

**ROCKING AND ROLLING  
OUR WAY  
THROUGH WRITING**



**JACKSONVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY  
2009 SUMMER WRITING INSTITUTE**

# **Jacksonville State University Writing Project Anthology**

Summer 2009

Jacksonville State University  
Jacksonville, Alabama

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## Dedication

*"To teach is to learn twice." – Joseph Joubert*

This anthology is dedicated to the children we teach and those that teach us.



## Foreword

### Where We Are From

We are from students of all ages, from kindergarten to college.

We are from the cluttered and cold tables in Stone Center.

We are from the aroma of a grits casserole, the sweetness of red velvet cake.

We are from “1-2-3, Back to me!” “WoW!” and “Pay attention!”

We are from rides on a Harley, from muddy Amy, from Flat Stanley.

We are from a hot man and a turnip green stand.

We are from *querer* and *gustar*, from eukaryotic, prokaryotic, and bio-film.

We are from a hippie grandma, a vampire boyfriend, a different perspective.

We are from mountains and porches and have names with meaning.

We are from Gloria’s direction, Lisa’s encouragement, Enithie’s smiles, Melissa’s support, and

Rodney’s technological expertise.

We have many voices; we have two voices; we are of one voice.

We are teachers, and we are all checkers!

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## Daily Schedule

9:00-9:30  
Group Time  
Journals  
Announcements

9:30-11:00  
Teacher Demo

11:00-12:00  
Reading  
Writing  
Research

12:00-1:00  
Lunch




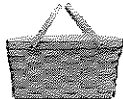

1:00-3:00  
Response  
Groups

3:00-4:00  
Roundtable  
Discussions  
Announcements  
Wrap-Up



# Special Events

June 8, 2009-July 2, 2009

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<b>8</b>  Welcome & Orientation	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>  Karaoke Lunch	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b> Alumni Refresher Ellen Shelton  "Grooving with Grammar"	<b>19</b>
<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>  Picnic at the Alumni House	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>  Graduation	

## Demonstration Summaries

### Who Is Telling This Story Anyway?

*Who Is Telling This Story Anyway?: Experimenting with Point of View* provides an opportunity for students to become active in the reading and writing processes by challenging them to view a selected story from the perspective of another character. Students are given the opportunity to view professional pieces which show the same narrative from multiple points of view, such as Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* and *Midnight Sun* or Anton Chekhov's and Joyce Carol Oates's different versions of "The Lady with the Pet Dog." Afterwards, students are challenged to rewrite a work of their own from a different point of view. This practice is easily adapted to suit any grade level using almost any book, short story, or poem as a basis for the adaptation.

Susan Shellhorse Ashley

### What's in a Name?

#### What the Meaning of Your Name Says About You

This demonstration focused on using the definition, origin, and story behind the student's name to create a bio poem or vignette. Before this lesson, each student was assigned the homework of interviewing parents and/or guardians to discover why the student's name was selected for him or her. The teacher began the lesson by asking students what they already knew about their names. Next, the teacher discussed Bio Poems, went over the Bio Poem format, and read some examples. Then the class read a vignette from Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* called "My Name." Students had the option to create a vignette of their own modeled after "My Name." Students took about thirty minutes of writing time and then came back together as a group to share work.

Ann Blackwood

### This Toothbrush is for You!

In this demonstration, a PowerPoint presentation compares and contrasts eukaryotic and prokaryotic cells, establishes bacteria as prokaryotic cells, and introduces biofilm, a new concept on a complication of bacteria colonization, exhibiting an effective way to teach students. Biofilm formation is symbolized by having students make biofilm sundaes. As the students eat their biofilm sundaes, the students are given an assignment. The assignment is to create and describe in a paragraph their personally designed toothbrushes to rid their mouths of plague, a biofilm found on teeth. Following the sharing of their toothbrush designs, work is placed on the wall in the form of a giant toothbrush.

Vanessa Bonner

### **Hieroglyphics: Writing with Pictures**

This demonstration focuses on elementary students being able to interpret the use of graphic sources, such as a picture, a map, or a chart, to enhance understanding of the story, "Seeker of Knowledge, The Man Who Deciphered Egyptian Hieroglyphs," by James Rumford. A graphic source organizes information and makes it easy to see. The lesson also focuses on students asking questions to expand the understanding of graphic sources before, during, and after reading. This lesson begins with a read aloud of "Silent Debate" by Cathy Spagnoli to check students' listening comprehension for the cause and effect skill. Next, new vocabulary words and their definitions are reviewed on PowerPoint along with informational text on Jean-Francois Champollion, the Rosetta Stone, and Napoleon Bonaparte, on which the story is based. The story is written with hieroglyphs in the text, and students use graphic sources to help them better understand their meanings. After the lesson, students complete a writing activity describing an important discovery they make, using their own hieroglyphs and some of the vocabulary words. Students also draw a cartouche and write their name inside, using Egyptian hieroglyphs. This lesson helps students understand the concept of communication before letters and words ever existed.

Debbie Fancher

### **Teaching Narrative Writing using "Good Directions"**

This unit uses country artist Billy Currington's song "Good Directions" to demonstrate plot structure in narrative writing. Technology is incorporated through playing a student-made video which narrates the song. The students are given a graphic organizer and are instructed to pick what they believe are the introduction/exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution/denouement. After a group discussion about student responses, the teacher reads a personal writing that shares a life moment with the students. Next, students do a turn-and-talk to brainstorm paper ideas about an embarrassing moment in their lives. Then, they write their own narrative pieces. This unit is based on the Alabama Course of Study for seventh grade.

Julie Higdon

### **Teaching Novels Using *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan: A Learner Centered Approach**

The purpose of this demonstration is three-fold: to raise awareness about the difficulties of teaching novels in K-12 schools, to reduce student anxiety in dealing with large texts, and to motivate students to take charge of their own learning. In this demonstration, "The Red Candle" from Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* is chosen because it is an engaging text and easy to chunk. With this text, the Jigsaw method is used, which is a learner centered approach to reading. In Jigsaw, students simply break off into home groups with each student responsible for a part of the text being read. Students then break off from their home groups to join expert groups that had the same part of the text. The expert groups read, take notes, discuss the material read, and return to home groups with information to share. This collaborative method makes students responsible for their own learning, which can be particularly difficult concerning reading. After reading and sharing in Jigsaw groups, the class watches a clip of the film version of the novel that corresponds to the vignette read. While viewing the film, students use a Venn Diagram graphic organizer to compare and contrast information read and viewed. After the lesson, students reflect on the lesson, commenting on what they liked most and least about the lesson, what made them think, and what they thought was the most important point. Reflection is not only good for practitioners, but it is also beneficial for the students.

Jesse Kennedy

### **Place Writing: Where Are You From?**

George Ella Lyon's poem titled "Where I'm From" serves as inspiration for students to write about long-forgotten childhood memories and experiences that have shaped their lives. After students brainstorm a list of personal childhood memories, the instructor encourages small group and whole group discussions, asking students to focus on connections and feelings evoked from these memories. Next, the instructor leads students as they read and discuss Lyon's poem as well as other students' written versions of "Where I'm From." Finally, students write their own poems using Lyon's as a model. The use of technology to create digital poetry movies enhances the final products. This activity promotes opportunities for students to interpret the author's message, imitate the author's style and form, use the writing process, and integrate available technology to create and communicate; the lesson is easily adaptable for most grade levels and content area topics. More importantly, it allows students to reflect, write, and share special memories with others.

Lisa Light

### **Tell Me a Story: Writing About Family Heritage**

*Tell Me a Story: Writing About Family Heritage* provides suggestions for a unit on individual, familial, and cultural identity. Through assignments such as the family tree and the individual or family coat of arms, students may learn more about visual symbolism as well as their own identities and that of their families. The unit also includes an oral history interview assignment ("Tell Me a Story") that can be used to teach narrative writing and the proper use of quotation marks and documentation. By using art, research, and writing, students can draw on their own strengths to convey their identities in the context of history and culture. This unit can be adapted to most grade levels and is especially suited to integration with related subject areas such as history, literature, and geography.

Joy Maloney

### **U S Civil Right Children's Crusade "Poem In Two Voices"**

This lesson is designed to incorporate African American History into the regular classroom setting so that students can become more diversified in their knowledge of African American History. A slide show which contains a video of the most important events that took place during the Civil Rights Movement is incorporated. Picture templates are used in the lesson plan so that student can put themselves into the place of the person in the picture. The students then create a poem in two voices.

Sharon L Meeks

### **Tactful, Not Tacky: Mastering Tone by Using the Direct and Indirect Approaches**

This lesson deals with achieving the proper tone in workplace writing, especially in letters, memos, and emails. The following terms are defined: the acronym MAPS (message, audience, purpose, and style); tone (the writer's attitude—not *what* is said but *how* it is said); the "you" attitude (focusing on the reader, especially by using second-person pronouns); the "Golden Rule" of workplace writing (writing the kinds of documents that writers would prefer to receive themselves were the situation reversed); the Direct Approach (the main idea is stated at the beginning of the document); the Indirect Approach (the main idea is stated later in the document); and adjustment letter (a letter written in response to a complaint). Students learn that the Direct Approach is used for delivering "good news" and simple or non-controversial messages. They learn that the Indirect Approach is used for delivering "bad news," controversial news, or complex messages. Students then read a complaint letter and are instructed to write an adjustment letter in response. Half the class uses the Direct Approach to write a "good news" letter saying "yes" to the customer's request; the other half uses the Indirect Approach to write a "bad news" letter saying "no" to the customer's request. The students then share their letters and discuss how the two approaches help writers achieve the correct tone.

David Myer

### **Rhythms and Writing: Writing the “Hoedown Throwdown”**

Music can be used in any classroom, regardless of subject area, as a strategy for students to learn to write rhythmically using patterns. After the teacher shows two video clips of the “Hoedown Throwdown” by Miley Cyrus, the class participates in learning the dance moves to the song. The practice will begin slowly without any music. Once the moves are mastered, students will begin moving more quickly to eventually perform the dance with the music playing. The teacher then presents the class with a copy of the song lyrics. Students are asked to use the rhythmic pattern of the song’s chorus to write a piece that corresponds to it. The teacher will instruct the students to choose the subject of their pieces, or the teacher may present pre-selected prompts. Upon completion, students will read their lyrics in the same rhythmic pattern as the song chorus. This activity promotes fitness with a writing connection, and musical twist. This provides opportunities to practice patterned writing and rhythmic reading.

Julie Samples

### **Incorporating the Use of Technology in Writing**

“Incorporating the Use of Technology in Writing” is designed to illustrate the various ways that technology can be used to teach vocabulary and writing. The lesson shows how to use reading strategies and how to tailor the before, during, and after activities to a specific content area. The lesson incorporates technology in the form of Voki, Quizlet, Power Point and Wikispaces to encourage and improve writing. Educators are shown how to create webpages, avatars, and online games and how to incorporate these into the writing process so that retention of the materials taught is accomplished. This presentation also helps to show the different ways that technology in the classroom can address the different learning styles and ultimately allow the student to personalize learning, which is the goal of education.

Theresa Thomas



### **Flat Stanley Visits New York**

This demonstration focuses on the way to properly write a letter as students study geography through the use of a handmade Flat Stanley paper doll. For this lesson, the students read a book entitled *Flat Stanley* by Jeff Brown. This book is based on a young boy who is flattened by a large bulletin board that hangs above his bed. After reading, students learn the parts of a letter, and they write an introduction letter explaining Flat Stanley. This letter will also include their expectations and a time line for his safe return, along with a self-addressed envelope. Next, the students will create their own Flat Stanley doll using material, markers, scissors, glue, and yarn. At last, they will each mail their Flat Stanley doll, the letter, and a journal to someone who lives in another state or even country. The person they mail it to is expected to document his or her journey with Flat Stanley and return it in a timely manner. This entire activity takes place over a period of one week's class sessions. This lesson serves as a means for students to learn more about geography and share in the experiences that Flat Stanley enjoyed on his visit.

Allyson Tyler



## **SUSAN ASHLEY**

Never quit. Never stop trying. Period

**Where I'm From**  
(For Daddy)

I am from Co. Rd. 66,  
From pickup trucks and Dingo boots  
I am from dirt roads  
(gravel and dust  
slung into the air)  
I am from the creek bed,  
The old cabin  
That is filled with my mom's  
Childhood memories.

I'm from Heard's and the Tasty Dip  
I'm from "Elvira" and "Jolene"  
I'm from Now-n-Laters and ice cream cones  
From "don't tell Ruth" and she knows anyway  
I'm from whatever church was having vacation  
Bible school that week.

I'm from the Willinghams and the Whitleys  
From sawdust and sweet tea  
From the finger my dad lost fixing a tractor  
(And the excuse it became not to change my diapers).  
Under my bed were books  
*Soup* running wild,  
A slice of *Superfudge*,  
And a book for my own dreams.

I am from the boondocks and the university,  
Sand Mountain and Mountain Brook  
Clearing a path for my son.

Susan Shellhorse Ashley



### Indifference

She was a good Southern old maid complete with an unusual name, Aunt Izora. Most of the time I can't remember to which side of my father's family she was related, and I have to remind myself that she was a Maddox, my grandmother's sister. She never married, and she lived in a house a block from my grandparents, Ralph and Jessie Mae. Aunt Izora and her home were alike in that they were both indifferent to the modern world and those who lived in it. The kitchen floor still had the original linoleum, and the countertops were covered in a laminate I am sure they quit making sometime around 1963 when the house was built. The kitchen's dinette would now be called fashionably retro, but even then it was just old. The only television was in the kitchen because living rooms were meant for something else entirely. All of these things were kept in pristine condition which was testament to the lack of exposure to any activity other than the daily habits of an old woman. She lived the same day over and over, and repeating a routine that seldom varied meant that little happened that was new or unexpected.

Since she lived so close to my grandparents, I remember visiting her in the summer or when she had the extended family over for lunch. Cousins that were related to me in some mysterious fashion would descend upon her house and seek the toys we knew must be there because we could not imagine a house without something designed to entertain children. What she did have was an oversized Dick-and-Jane type book and a few odds and ends picked up at yard sales or left behind by us children on an earlier visit. Nothing went together and nothing was new, so we

quickly moved on to the backyard. The only thing out there to capture our attention was an old clothesline she still used. We bored quickly of that. There were no pets to play with, and the aforementioned television was black and white and only picked up a few channels. Her car was of little interest, too, since it was made in the time when Nixon was still in office. She was indifferent to us children and would run out of conversation after asking how we were doing. Not having children of her own to compare us to, she usually only acknowledged us and felt embarrassed about not having anything else to say. We hid under her beds until our parents finally said it was time to go home.

As she got older, she became dependent on Social Security. So unaware of the world outside her door and intimidated by any intrusion it threatened to make on her meager existence, she was too scared to accept any financial help from the family for fear the Social Security Administration would cut off her check. Aunt Shy once left a one hundred dollar bill sitting on her dinette table. It stayed there until Shy's next visit. Aunt Izora never touched it. I imagine her eyeing it suspiciously and waiting for someone else to come and remove it before someone somewhere discovered its existence there in her house. Around this same time, she became unable to attend church. The small church she had attended in Albertville was overseen by a young, married preacher who would deliver taped recordings of the morning's service to his house-ridden parishioners. Normally this would include an invitation in, a communion of tea and cake, and a brief prayer with the ailing church member. However, my aunt's mores were also left untouched by the ever changing world. She did not deem it proper to allow a man to whom she was not related into

her home without a chaperone. She was eighty-six; he was in his thirties. Instead, the preacher was asked to leave the audio cassette between the door and the screen door. She wouldn't even open the door to retrieve the tape until he was safely out of her yard.

A few years later, she passed away. They found in her closet a hanging bag. Inside the bag were the clothes in which she wished to be buried – a suit, hose, heels, undergarments. Also enclosed were lists of songs and Bible verses to be incorporated into the funeral service. Most striking was the inclusion of a photograph which showed how she wished her hair and makeup to look when the time came. I often wonder if she bought the suit new or if it was one that she owned. Her polyester pink suit seemed so incongruous when placed in the context of its intended use. How long had it been hanging there in the back of the closet? Was it special to her in some way? The discovery of these items made her home seem like a tomb. They made it seem like a waiting room for some eternal rest home.

Years later, I seldom think of her. She was so unconcerned with the world and indistinguishable from any of hundreds of spinster sisters, aunts and cousins in our region of the world. She was unmoved by any of the cultural phenomena with which we seem to be so concerned. It seems only fitting for her to be forgotten by us the way she shut out the world and forgot about it. I remember her only as a quiet, disapproving old woman who chose to shut herself up in a mausoleum. However, as I age, my sentiments grow from a sense of her own indifference to something of curiosity. Was it a personal choice to remain unmarried? Did she lose a beau in a war? How did she end up alone, and did she feel lonely?

When I become too accustomed to a certain order of things, when I become comfortable with the arrangement of the furniture or the arrangement of my days, her memory reminds me of what is to be lost by not experimenting and by not welcoming the new and untried into my life. Her indifference will not become my own.



### **In Praise of Prewriting**

There is nothing more daunting to a freshman writer than a blank sheet of paper or the blinking cursor at the top of something still titled "Document 1." But, to me, there is nothing more beautiful and brimming with possibilities than a clean, college ruled, fresh sheet of paper. While students fret about not having enough to write, I feel paralyzed by having too much. Will I write about the people in my life? My tall, slender, feisty grandmother? The man who lives in town and wears a hard hat even though he does not now and never has worked construction? Or, the four boys who have made it their joint mission to delight and terrify me by turns? Will I express my thoughts about the writing process or injustice in the world?

Now, as an English teacher, I try to instill some of that wonder back into my students. I have acknowledged the transcendence of the digital age and all of the accoutrement that it entails. However, I still encourage my students to practice the act of writing with only a pen and paper and their own imaginations. Our textbooks spend pages and pages describing invention techniques or prewriting activities; however, students are most likely to skip these steps in an attempt to economize their time. It is important that students are encouraged to experiment with these steps often and repeatedly. To paraphrase the current text being used in the English Composition 1 classroom, prewriting is defined as a time to make decisions ranging from the general – selecting a topic and determining an organizational pattern – to the more specific – gathering information and drafting a thesis (Eschholz 7). With so much depending on this stage of the writing process, it is unlikely that a well-written, well-

developed essay may be written without paying an appropriate amount of attention to this step.

Within my classroom, I have developed several strategies that require the student to participate in prewriting activities. In her book *Preventing Plagiarism: Tips and Techniques*, Laura Hennessey DeSena writes in favor of encouraging students to use their own imagination in order to develop material (6). Prewriting is just the time for students to examine their own thoughts, opinions, and explore new possibilities. DeSena goes on to suggest an entire week should be spent of prewriting activities; however, in most classrooms, this is an ideal concept and is not feasible. We spend a good deal of our time merely getting students beyond their fear of writing anything at all. It seems that the blank piece of paper is a more terrifying adversary than many English teachers have come across.

Prewriting is the most natural phase of the writing process. It is a time when punctuation, spelling, grammar, and relevance do not matter. It is a way to draw up any and all ideas which may or may not seem important to the particular piece on which a student is working, but the ideas produced may become a central factor to the essay, short story, or poem as the writer progresses. Students should be encouraged to lose their inhibitions about writing and to experiment. Since this is an early stage in the process, they should be encouraged to recognize that they are not obligated to keep every last development or include everything they have written during prewriting in their final essay. Instead, they should try as many new things as possible during whichever prewriting activity has been chosen or assigned.

While prewriting is a time to explore, it should still be structured. The proven methods of prewriting include freewriting, listing/brainstorming, and clustering. Students often feel most comfortable with a particular prewriting activity; however, they should be asked to thoroughly explore the topic using two different methods of prewriting. This takes the student out of his comfort zone and may lead to new, unexpected discoveries in opinion or understanding of the topic. The act of freewriting requires that a student begins writing and does not stop until every possibility has been exhausted. This may mean that a student draws upon his knowledge of an issue, his opinion of the issue, the opinion of an expert on the issue, and sources where he may find more information. Students should not quit prewriting merely because an imposed time limit has been met or because they have enough to begin writing; they should prewrite until they have exhausted all possible ideas for the moment. Students should also be encouraged to revisit this and other stages of the writing process as the piece on which they are working progresses.

Prewriting is not merely a step in the writing process. It sharpens the critical analysis skills of the student by asking him or her to make connections and leaps in reasoning that may not have been obvious before the exercise. Prewriting develops a clearer, more substantial understanding of the topic. It also develops a student's ability to value his or her own ideas over "borrowing" ideas from other scholars. While many student writers feel free to skip this point of the process, it is my job as a teacher to teach them how invaluable it is to their development as writers and thinkers.

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### Teaching Shakespeare in the Time of Texting

One of the biggest challenges facing college instructors today is teaching literature to college freshmen who have no previous experience with the language of Chaucer, Wordsworth, or Shakespeare to name a few. The current generation has stripped language down to only the bare minimum in their own daily communications. These students have a difficult time understanding and processing texts that involve a vocabulary beyond acronyms and emoticons. These same students are able to recall the lyrics of the latest Kanye, Common, and T. I. song without hesitation, but they balk at a teacher's request to memorize a selection from *Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark*. Many of the words in Shakespeare's lexicon have since passed out of style or usage; however, as David Popkin writes in *Vocabulary Power through Shakespeare*, developing a better understanding of these words improves students' reading comprehension and broadens their vocabularies (vi). There are several other strategies that have been developed through trial and error in classrooms everywhere, but starting at the level of basic language and building up to a comprehensive appreciation of each individual play are made all the more challenging by students' apathy towards their own vocabularies. We must teach students to love language again, and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is the perfect place to start.

Students always seem overwhelmed at the mere mention of Shakespeare; thus, Breaking down *Hamlet* makes it become less intimidating to them. A teacher might begin with a scan of each act for words that may seem alien to the students to provide students with a vocabulary list for each act and encourage them to keep a bookmark list of words that may have slipped the teacher's notice. A bookmark list is simply a slip of

paper kept in the book as a marker that is used to make note of any word with which the student is unfamiliar. This allows them to read the text initially without stopping constantly to refer to a dictionary. After finishing an act, students should then seek the definition of the term and review the act for a better understanding of the action. These lists should be brought to class for further discussion. If the term is not to be found in a dictionary or the footnotes, help from the instructor may be necessary. Familiarizing them with terms such as *scruple*, *impetuous*, *remiss*, *infallible*, and *felicity* increases their awareness of the depths of their language which they have yet to encounter. Popkin has developed his own list of terms, their usage, and a brief quiz on these terms in his book, *Vocabulary Power through Shakespeare*. This provides a great beginning point for most teachers, but it should be expanded to include new terms as students' needs require.

Once students have familiarized themselves with reading the language of Shakespeare, it helps to have them actually perform a brief scene so they may hear the language out loud. Teachers may begin at the beginning with Act I Scene 1. The lesson plan for this assignment is available on the PBS website – [pbs.org](http://pbs.org). Students are able to identify the characters and their position as guards on duty at night as a familiar idea to them. Actually performing this small part of Shakespeare's play is far more meaningful to the student's comprehension of all the action that follows than merely watching a film based on the play. Watching these films is a valuable practice that should be visited later, but acting out this scene at this stage in the reading will enhance understanding for students. They develop a better understanding of the stage directions and setting descriptions as they seek to grasp why the men are out so late. It also increases the student's understanding of how the choices made by the actor determine the viewer's understanding of the play. It allows them to experiment with different renderings of the

scene by having them either select from a provided list or by allowing them to determine the style in which they wish to present the scene. Just like allowing them to paraphrase into their own language or slang, this allows them to take the scene and set it in a more familiar setting – a nightclub, a dormitory, a school function, etc. Students begin to appreciate that the situations in which Shakespeare places his characters are quite universal. Themes like love, betrayal, familial dysfunction, loyalty, and guilt and innocence may seem new concepts to young students, so this helps to show them that he is still relevant in a time when the Internet, texting, and video games seem to dominate the popular culture. Yet another way to reinforce this is to show students both versions of *Hamlet* – Mel Gibson’s traditional portrayal and Ethan Hawke’s modernized, corporate version. Comparing particular soliloquies side by side impresses upon the student the many ways actors and directors perceive and interpret the words from the written page.

Teaching Shakespeare to college-level students provides them with a deeper understanding of literature that is necessary to produce well-rounded graduates. It enhances their ability to understand and appreciate literature from any genre since Shakespeare covered such a broad spectrum of themes. Once time is spent orientating students to the language, they find that it is not as daunting a read as popular society has led them to believe.

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**ANN BLACKWOOD**

Survived first year; still love it!

## Where I'm From

I am from the deacon's bench,  
from long talks with Sambo beside the goldfish pond.

I am from Leslie Falls, behind Cole's house  
(which we named after  
our favorite book).

I am from the Bluffs,  
the Tennessee River,  
whose flowing waters washed away  
the indiscretions of my youth.

I'm from creamed corn and peppermints,  
from Peggy and Homer, Ora Lee and Buddy.  
I'm from the teasers and the criers,  
from he's no good for you and don't brake so fast.  
I'm from the grief of losing Michael, then Vance,  
then Lance and Mandy, to so many lost I'm hardened to young death.

I'm from Ed and Cindy's branch,  
now broken and withered.  
From trading bedrooms with my sister  
that we are no longer allowed to call our own.  
I am from my bookcase  
brimming with pictures of a life I used to know,  
a constant reminder of the perfect family I once had.

I am from those moments-  
Happy memories of a family tree  
that's had a branch snapped off.

### Confessions of a First Year Teacher

I think Forrest Gump said it best: "You never know what you're gonna get." This became my reality on September 1, 2008, when I stepped into my eighth grade classroom for the first time as the one and only teacher. Lesson plans in hand, I plastered a smile on my face with absolutely no idea of what was coming.

Everyone say that the first year of teaching is the hardest. This always made sense to me because, of course, I had never had my own classroom or created lesson plans that were actually used every single day. I had never been the sole disciplinarian in the classroom; until this point, I was always half of a duo. These initial fears don't even begin to cover what is actually experienced as a first-year teacher. In fact, statistics show that fifty percent of new teachers leave the profession for good within the first five years of teaching (Lambert).

I was handed a group of students who had been in school for a month already. They knew their teacher, her rules and expectations, and what to expect from her class. Then they got me, a fresh-off-the-press newbie who had substituted for them a few times. They hated me because I had been a sub who knew all the rules and now, worse, I was their permanent teacher! I thought I was going to lose it that first month; discipline hadn't been an issue with my seniors during student teaching, but I suddenly couldn't control a room full of eighth graders. I was later told it's the hormones; it makes middle school students difficult to control anyway, and they can smell fear. Classroom management had been something I prided myself on, and I was now watching it crumble at my feet.

Another difficulty I encountered was trying to figure out how to make the transition from one teacher to another as easy as possible for my students. To maintain the structure they were used to, I adopted their previous teacher's classroom rules, expectations, and procedures. While some would think this would make life easier, it didn't. There were some procedures I would have changed or tweaked, but I tried very hard to maintain normalcy for the students. I kept telling myself, "Just wait until next year! You'll get them from the start, and you can do it your way then!" My second year would be my year to do things my way from the start.

In addition to starting work a month into school, I had the added disaster of moving into a new building over Christmas break. During the fall semester, seventh and eighth grade teachers were housed at the high school, while the fifth and sixth grade teachers remained at the elementary school. When we moved to the new building, the students had all new administrators and a new bell schedule, some had lockers for the first time, and everyone had to learn new safety procedures. What a mess! Moving buildings mid-year should be avoided at all costs. This move created more discipline problems than I could have ever imagined. Fortunately, the assistant principal was wonderful and handled these matters quickly, making examples of the first several students to step out of line.

As the year drew to an end, I did receive a pink slip. I knew it was coming because I was under a special contract, but it hurt just the same. The kids were livid when they heard. These horrible, evil, precious, loving students wrote emails, made phone calls, and drew up petitions for another teacher and me. These kids who had hated me

seven months earlier were now rallying to save my job! It didn't work, but it did touch my heart. I was comforted in knowing I had touched their lives enough that they cared whether or not I had a job. I had a great roller coaster ride of a first year, but sometimes it's not so bad "never knowing what you're gonna get!"

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### The Porch

We all stood on the porch and cried the day they moved out. We knew the house would be sold, or at the very least, strangers would move in, and our beloved porch would court others. With so many memories etched in the peeling blue paint, the blue of a weathered sailor's eyes, there were no words to speak. We stood together and let the tears fall.

It was not our porch, mine or Brett's, but we loved it as if it were. It was attached to the house our friends Travis, Jesse, and Brian lived in. Anyone in Jacksonville could be seen from this porch as they drove to their various destinations near the campus. At any given moment, there could be anywhere from one to twenty of us congregating on the porch, depending on the time of day and the activity at hand.

My favorite memory was somewhat scandalous: when I snuck over to the house to meet Brett there, before we were ever dating. How is this scandalous? Well, I was kind of, sort of dating someone at the time... I remember parking on the street, even though the house was only two houses away from my own. I didn't want to leave my car at my own home and be discovered I was actually someplace else. I sat on that porch and jumped every time a car drove past, sure it was someone I knew and in the dark eleven o'clock hour, so sure they could see my face as clear as day.

The porch was decorated in true college fashion: a hammock, an old couch, a camp chair, and a recliner. We gathered there, even in winter, bundled against the cold. It always smelled of cigarette smoke, the kind that hangs thick in the air like a comforting blanket that can be wrapped around you several times, only to tangle around and choke



you later. Sometimes the smell of the roses broke through in spring and summer. They grew in spite of us, determined to beautify our acrid gathering place.

So many wonderful memories; so many sad ones. We brought chips and salsa to our first Super Bowl party as a couple. We celebrated Travis's graduation, only to turn around the next day and say good-bye. Many a Braves game was watched through the windows, the TV turned just so we could watch and remain outside. Many nights were spent swinging, sharing relationship advice again and again. On that porch, lazy days of summer faded with us sometimes doing nothing other than smoking cigarette after cigarette.

Now they're gone, moved out to other towns, other houses. I can still see the house from my kitchen window when I wash dishes. My dog still tries to go visit them when I take her on walks. I have to explain gently, "No, no sweetie. Our friends don't live there anymore."

### Epilogue

We still live down the street from the porch, but strangers have inherited the house. I drive by and stare as I once did before I knew the residents of the porch I came to love. It seems such a waste now, not a home for hammocks and old couches and chairs, only boasting a set of pink golf clubs and a bicycle. I wonder if they know what they're missing.





## **VANESSA BONNER**

Today I'm water, tomorrow Moscato d'Asti wine

## *Where I'm From*

I am from hot combs,  
From Blue Magic and DAX.  
I am from the six-foot gated backyard adventures.  
I am from the dogwood,  
My representation of peace  
And the magnolia,  
With leaves covered with wax of love  
To protect my daily devotions.  
I am from ALWAYS wearing dresses on Sunday mornings  
And beautiful brown eyes,  
From Mustang Margie and Mane, Lucille and Laura Mae.

I am from all forms of dance and fervent prayer.  
From "If you don't do right here how can you do it outside" to  
"No matter what we will always love you."  
I am from "Blessed assurance, **JESUS** is mine" and where  
That relationship is the most important thing in life.  
I'm from the gem in the hills by way of Blackmon's bend,  
Selma's Church's chicken and fried catfish.  
From the "chicka! chicka! whoo!" railway stories told by my  
Granddaddy and Uncle Nathaniel, and my mother's breast  
cancer.  
I am from the moments and times  
That were high and low points in life.  
But now that I look back,  
I see the connect-the-dot image of a fulfilled life.

-Vanessa Marie Bonner



### **I, too, Sing 'Sweet Home, Alabama'**

**I, too, sing 'Sweet Home, Alabama.'**  
**I am the darker sister.**  
**They sent my mother to a separate but equal school**  
**When Jim Crow and *Ferguson* lingered.**  
**But when I was birthed,**  
**I knew only *Brown* and Marshall**  
**And became a second generation teacher for my Alabama youth.**

**Today,**  
**I know any student can be President of the United States.**  
**When Jim Crow's and Ferguson's descendants come**  
**Nobody'll dare**  
**Say go to "your" school to me or my students**  
**But, perhaps**  
**Continue to call my elders "boy" or "girl,"**  
**Immediately assume my brothers will steal, kill, and destroy,**  
**And refer to me like the sister or brother portrayed in the media**  
**Because of "once you know one you know them all" mentalities.**

**Even though**  
**They have always seen my beauty**  
**And confused**  
**By their shame, produced prejudice,**  
**I will proceed.**

**I, too, am 'Swcet Home, Alabama'.**

## *Through His Eyes*

I did not see his hurt;  
I did not see his pain;  
I know he bore it alone  
But I don't know whence it came.

We all grew up together;  
We all laughed and cried;  
He showed his love for his mother  
Just like you and I.

I guess I'll never know  
Why people carry on this way  
And how a grown man could kill his mother  
In the hours between night and day.  
My family felt much shame  
But we didn't know why  
Because you see my cousin could not properly express the feelings  
He buried so deep inside.

I know it wasn't him but what can I say—  
His fingerprints were left on that single blade.  
Surprisingly, I believe this is common among others that kill this way.  
Other people see the signs but don't know what to do or say.  
We hide them from our sight and keep them from our minds  
Until one day we see what was hidden behind their eyes.  
The issues they were dealing with which came from what seems nowhere.  
It was a mental disorder of which no one was aware.

We feel we are at a loss when we can't help each other.  
When we can't find help, we sometimes don't contact one another.  
Even they know the system where it is easy to sign themselves out  
Or refuse to sign a waiver to tell the family all medical whereabouts.  
Unfortunately, too often you find them on the streets  
where they receive a check but have no friend among all they meet.  
They sometimes end up on TV as a man or woman on death row  
when all along they wanted  
some sort of mental control.

### I Was Hazed

“They call it hazing—that first year,” a veteran teacher consultant for the National Writing Project stated to console a first-year teacher. As I, a first-year teacher, sat overhearing the conversation in the teacher-to-teacher mentoring program, I could identify with the previous statement. According to the *Webster’s New World College Dictionary*, one definition of hazing is “to punish or harass by forcing someone to do hard, unnecessary work” (Webster 645). I believe a couple of key words, “unnecessary” and “work,” in the definition are important to note. Also, the question arises, “Is work ever unnecessary?” I believe it can be. Not too long ago, I was the last teacher to leave the school in the afternoons, and in some case, I left after the principal, while some veteran teachers made it to their cars before students made it to the buses. I suspect that many first-year teachers, due to lack of experience, feel compelled or forced to do tasks that veteran teachers reason unnecessary. In fact, upon reflection, I now feel several of the tasks I once deemed necessary were unnecessary.

New teachers are considered to be most vulnerable to workplace conditions (Weiss 862). For example, upon arrival for the first days of school, I was notified that there were not enough LCD projectors for every classroom, and it would “behoove me” to find the librarian so I could get on a first-come-first-serve list to borrow a library projector. As a science teacher in a school system without microscopes, the LCD projector was a necessity to visually present microscopic concepts to students. However, the task of finding the librarian presented a disadvantage, considering I did not know who or where the librarian was. I

immediately combed the halls, despite the need to set up a new classroom, learned how to use the school's computer system, and put up the hallway's bulletin board, looking for a librarian who did not appear until the first faculty meeting. I had unnecessarily vied for a position on the list to only receive an LCD projector several months later.

According to an article concerning a National Education Association (NEA) study, half of all new teachers tend to quit in the first five years due to "poor working conditions and low salaries" (Lambert A7). One teacher reported her salary did not compensate for the level of stress she experienced from school issues (Lambert A7). Personally, I agree and feel there is no price tag to compensate for long nights planning outside of school due to the system's policy of not issuing textbooks outside class; random moments of crying due to feeling overwhelmed with stress caused by students who come from harsh environments; and other unforeseen issues, like presently, still not being paid an agreed amount for extracurricular sponsorships because paperwork by administrators was not completed.

Among the American teachers expressing discontent in teaching, several reported "inadequate support from the school administration and poor student motivation to learn" (Weiss 862). Although I was in a system that was beginning to thrive in technology and its funding, I felt moments of inadequate support from the school administration. For instance, I notified the local administrators that I had more students than chairs (hoping that some students would be removed). An administrator's original reaction was to check the roster and deny that I had the number of students I stated. However, the official neglected to understand that there

were two rosters for one class, one for the regular class and another for an inclusive class. Realizing I had the number I initially stated, his reaction was to send an email to the other teachers stating if they had any extra chairs to send them to me. I did not receive any chairs and found myself unnecessarily hauling and borrowing chairs from teachers when all students came to class, until I found a helpful janitor who offered me the chairs I needed.

The large class continued to be a problem for me. Several of the students were determined to do the bare minimum every day, considering it was their senior year. One day, during a random locker inspection for drugs, the particularly large class was required to stay an extra twenty minutes, an amount of time that was unknown during the inspection. For every minute past the required time for class to end, the students would become more and more unruly until the administrator in the hall walked in and told the students to be quiet. The administrator walked out, and the students instantaneously became loud again, causing the official to walk back in. The administrator proceeded to tell me in front of the students to write a list of the unruly students so they could be transferred to another class. This was the class I had identified as overcrowded. I immediately made and turned in the list, but found it was an unnecessary task because the administrator never transferred any of the listed or unlisted students out of the class. At that point, I felt alone and lacked faith in the support of the school system.

There will be a consistent need for teachers over the next few years, not only in the United States but abroad (Weiss 862). Great Britain, for example, has experienced a depression in teacher recruitment (Weiss 862). When there are

inadequate instructional “supplies and opportunities for professional development, teachers cannot teach: poor work place conditions make teaching difficult and likely to accelerate the attrition of new teachers” (Weiss 863).

Throughout the past year’s teaching experience, there were several times I should have said no. I should have said no to watching classes for other teachers, no to allowing excess students in the classroom when it was not my responsibility to find or haul chairs, and no to every unnecessary task that created stress. I believe the ability to recognize when situations are unnecessary is often clouded by the undue responsibility of a work environment that is in place before a new teacher comes in (Weiss 863). While there were several good moments I experienced from school administrators, fellow teachers, and students, the moments that felt like punishment or harassment overshadow my view of the profession. Last year, I felt as though I was hazed. It is my hope that first-year teachers will reflect before the end of the year and communicate with administrators, teachers, and students concerns to remove unnecessary tasks that create stress. At this point, I find myself with a strong desire never to go back to the classroom.

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# **GENA CHRISTOPHER**

The end is just the  
beginning.....

## My Name

Gena

Queen with a rusty crown

Italian

Daughter of high school sweethearts

Named for Gina Lollobrigida, seen at the Lake Theatre by a too-young father

Who loves all of the names in the graveyard, my cousins' names

Who needs connections and to feel successful

Who gives encouragement, smiles, and sometimes unwanted advice

Who fears choosing my path instead of following God's

Who would like to see my children love books as much as I do

Resident of Stone Center, Taylor's Bend, Happy Home, Clear Springs

Estes

Greek, A family name on the Island of Sardinia

Which means Productive, Warrior

From an unknown great-grandparent who traveled to Macon, Georgia

Through a PaPaw who loved his family

Who needed to read his Bible, the newspaper, and a good book every day

Who gave me a connection, a strong work ethic, and a "poor, white Greek" name

Who brought brand new dollars down from the hay loft when we passed

Who would have liked my husband, the carpenter

Resident of Clear Springs Baptist Church cemetery

Christopher

### When I was Young in the Rocket City

When I was young in the Rocket City,  
we took field trips to the Space Museum,  
and on Saturdays, I begged to go back.  
I saw the monkeys that were the first space travelers,  
drank Tang,  
and watched movies of rockets blasting off into the sky.

When I was young in the Rocket City,  
one cold winter day, Werner von Braun passed our school.  
We children lined up along the highway to wave at him,  
and the girls got to wear pants to school for the only time that year.  
My mom sewed me a special pants suit for the occasion  
and a maxi coat to match.

When I was young in the Rocket City,  
the first man took that Giant Leap.  
We all ran outside to look up at the moon.  
I thought I saw him there,  
but my daddy said my glasses weren't that good.

When I was young in the Rocket City,  
I loved the planetarium.  
I would lie back in the darkened auditorium,  
dream up at the stars,  
and plan to take off myself someday.

When I was young in the Rocket City,  
my neighbors were from around the world.  
I dreamed of having P-Ex privileges  
and of someday owning a koala bear.  
I thought I might like to be Catholic too--  
the nuns who lived next door were so cool --  
and they cussed!

When I was young in the Rocket City,  
I believed in unlimited possibilities.

### **The Winds of Change in Writing Instruction**

It is the twenty-first year of the JSU National Writing Project which means that twenty-one years ago, I sat in these desks, a teacher fellow, eager to learn more about the teaching of writing and afraid that I would not live up to the task. The changes in me are obvious ones. I am physically older; however, most days I don't feel much older than I did then. My hair is grayer, or at least it was last week, but after a trip to the beauty salon, it is pretty much the same color now that it was two decades ago. As a teacher, one might expect that with older I am wiser, yet I still want my students to learn more than they are willing to learn, get excited about a lesson that goes well, regret a missed opportunity to teach a student when I see one pass me by, and second-guess myself on those days that I feel defeated. During my first Writing Project experience, I wrote a position paper about the bad side of change in education. My title "Don't throw out the baby with the bath water" pretty much says it all. As a high school teacher, I was greatly bothered by the way change occurred in my profession. I saw teachers throwing away every good thing from the past to embrace each new trend or idea. I had no idea then just how much education would change in the next twenty years, and I still see us making those same mistakes as we try each new approach with our students.

One of the most obvious changes through these last few years is in the use of technology. I began my teaching career thrilled that my parents were able to purchase an electric typewriter for my graduation present. It would be years before I saw my first computer and many more years before I actually owned one. When I went through the writing project the first time, the secretary in the English department had a computer, but she was still using DOS; the Windows operating system had not even been invented yet.

Back then, a floppy disk really was floppy, and these held very little information. One really needed to understand a little about computers to use one, and using one in the classroom was not considered. No one could afford one, and we would not have known what to do with it if we could. Today, our greatest interest as writing instructors is how to meet our students where they are – online. Every teacher has a computer, and most have them at home and at school. Also, every student has access to one, and most own their own. Little true computer knowledge is needed to use a computer. Windows, Java, Intel, Linux: all are household names or buzz words. Most of us don't know what they mean; we don't really even care; we just know that we have them, and we are proud that we do.

As a writing instructor, I see another change which is related to this first. In 1988, the message of the day was the process approach to writing. As teachers, we were encouraged to encourage our students to use all of the steps in the process. Clustering, brainstorming, Venn diagrams, and "writing the natural way" were touted across the country at conferences and workshops. The National Writing Project was a relatively new idea, and teachers were rarely treated as professionals in any arena. My first experiences with this group were like a breath of fresh air, yet I was a little concerned that our students might become lazy if they were not expected to write on demand, the way I had been taught just a few years before.

Now, newer teachers may be shocked to know that teachers did not always view writing as a process that took time to complete, nor were students always encouraged to express themselves personally through their writing. To be given a topic and an hour to create a finished essay would seem impossible to most students today, and most teachers

of writing would never even consider requiring their students to do so. We have already decided that students should be allowed to use computers during the writing process, instead of requiring all papers to be handwritten. Now, we wonder how we can patrol plagiarists and discuss programs like Safe Assign and Turn-it-in. With the ability to download everything from music to movies to complete books, intellectual property seems to have no real ownership, and we wonder whether we should continue to battle to teach our students how to properly cite a source when even MLA cannot really decide how to deal with online sources.

Teachers who have been around for awhile question practices like using note cards for research writing, yet our students have no real interest in research, and they will never again do it the way we did – going to a library, searching through books and periodicals, and processing what is read to come up with a critical piece. Instead of writing the traditional research paper, students are told to write diaries depicting the lives of famous people, create PowerPoint presentations about a certain writer or piece of writing, produce movies which illustrate some problem or invention. Group projects are more often the norm, and students are not expected to create in a vacuum – they are not even expected to create within the classroom. Instead, they research, write, and publish their writing in cyberspace through online databases, processing programs, blog spots, and discussion boards.

Several years ago, before I went through writing project for the first time, the father of one of my students asked that I be certain to use sentence diagramming in my grammar instruction. He remembered this as the practice which helped him to understand grammar. Now, teachers rarely even teach grammar. The feeling is that

students will learn the proper conventions of Standard English through their reading and writing. Some teachers argue that an ever-increasing course of study does not allow time for grammar instruction, that students are bored by it, that teachers don't really understand it themselves, and, therefore, they do not feel comfortable teaching grammar. I have even heard a teacher say that most of the rules were out-of-date and unnecessary. I wonder if most new teachers would even know how to diagram a sentence. And, of course, grammar-check and spell-check are always there to take care of those pesky problems when students have errors in their writing.

Looking back on these last few paragraphs, I wonder, what has really changed in twenty-one years? I am still concerned that we throw away what matters to embrace what is new; however, now I am much more concerned that what we are losing cannot be regained. As our society learns to communicate through emoticons and abbreviated parts of words instead of complete words, sentences, or thoughts, and as we rely more and more on computers, not only to transmit our ideas, but to edit them as well, we are losing our ability to communicate. As writing teachers begin to replace the word "write" with "create" and accept any art form (photographs, music, videos, podcasts) as writing, our students may be given the permission to fly, but they have not been given the wings to support that flight. Of course, as teachers, we know that we should use every opportunity to encourage students to write. If meeting our students online is the answer to motivating them to create written works of quality, we should definitely learn ways to incorporate computers into our classrooms. However, before the first key is struck or the first screen window is opened, teachers must find ways to instill the basic structure of the language in their students. Perhaps they may even need to return to some of the old

methods of grammar instruction to provide this basis to their students. Some teachers may even need to learn grammar themselves to be able to teach their students.

No doubt, the ways that we teach our students will continue to change, and we will never return to some of the old ways. Rarely will anyone create a piece of writing with pen on paper, and teachers will always be faced with the necessity to learn about new ideas as quickly as their students do. It didn't hurt me to learn about the writing process, and I am happy to be able to share with my students the knowledge I have gained through the study of this process. And, I would be the first to admit that computer-generated compositions are easier to read, and generally, the spelling is better. Yet, I still find myself resistant to total change, and I still believe that my grandparents were right when they said that you should never "throw out the baby with the bath water." Old does not always mean bad; sometimes it just means that the practice has stood the test of time, and young teachers would probably be well served if they took some time to learn how to properly diagram a sentence.





**DEBBIE FANCHER**

Let it be me, it is me

## I Am From

I am from playing outside from morning till dark,  
riding bicycles, and playgrounds in the park,  
no worries for mom and dad.

I am from houses on blocks that are great for hide and seek,  
move over ants, spiders, and such.  
I am from dandelions galore that scatter when you blow,  
but don't inhale or you'll choke as you go.

I am from peanut butter and jelly sandwiches,  
pork and beans from the can that were so yummy and easy to make.  
I am from "Go outside and play,"  
"Don't slam the door!" and "Where's your sister and brother?"

I am from Tillie and Ada, what a combo!!  
alcohol, church, hard workers, caretakers,  
but, love through it all.

I am from four girls and two boys (upper-lower-half),  
shy, sheltered, and cared for by mom and big brother.  
I am from happiness, tears, joys, sadness,  
a roller coaster racing towards its next loop.

I am from a mother's love, distant father,  
caring and loving siblings,  
with fresh generations to love and create new memories.

## My Plate Runneth Over!

Teaching in the state of Alabama is a very rewarding career. The Alabama Course of Study (COS) gives teachers specific criteria for each subject taught. To help our teachers make sure we teach all standards required, our school system created pacing guides for us to follow. These guides, done for each subject, tell us which concepts are to be taught each nine weeks. These have become useful tools in helping our teachers align our curriculum with the Alabama COS.

Being a fourth grade teacher can be fun but incredibly wearing. Our class is a self-contained classroom, so we teach all subjects: math, reading, language, spelling, grammar, science, and history. Writing should also be taught, but there simply is no time in the day to fit it in. With our plates running over, last year, our school adopted a new reading series that took a toll on all our teachers. This adoption added unexpected workload, especially since our teacher's manuals did not arrive until after school had begun. It takes time to become familiar with a new reading program, especially this specific series.

Our new series has much to offer our students and teachers -- wonderful stories that include spelling, language, grammar, and writing lessons, ideas for small group station work, and books beneficial to all reading levels. There are many good things about this series, but my concern is that the amount of material to be covered is overwhelming! It can't be done **effectively** in the time allotted.

Our school's reading block is set at 120 minutes per day. This includes thirty minutes of whole-group instruction including vocabulary, read alouds, schema, and purpose. Next, there are sixty minutes for small-group instruction. While the teacher is working with a group (advanced, level, or below level), the remaining students are

working independently, with a partner, or in other small groups. After this is completed, there is an additional thirty minutes allotted to teach spelling, language, and grammar.

One would think 120 minutes per day would be sufficient to adequately teach reading. Not with this series! Many days I found myself teaching reading well past the given reading time and still not being able to cover all the material. When our day offered time to cover grammar, spelling, and language, I felt like a tornado. I omitted the insignificant material and moved on. By the time we finished, I felt physically drained and exhausted. I squeezed in as much science and history as possible before we dismissed. At the end of the day, I just hoped that the students comprehended it all.

I continually found myself asking, "Is teaching reading this way actually making my students better readers? What sacrifices are they making unknowingly?" My answer to these would be *no, they are not becoming better readers, and my students are sacrificing important lessons of science, history, and even math*, simply because so much emphasis is being placed on this series. Many days, there was no time left to teach science or history because it was time to dismiss for the day. I felt it wasn't important, though, as long I completed the reading lesson for that day, no matter how long it took.

During National Writing Project, I began reading the book, *Readicide*, by Kelly Gallagher. In the first chapter, I felt as if he were writing about me and my teaching. Because the state mandates the amount of material taught in each subject, Gallagher found that some teachers are being "forced to adopt a shallow approach, sprinting through material" when teaching content lessons (11). He discussed how teachers are teaching to multiple-choice tests, rather than tests that require deeper thinking. As a result, students are becoming shallow thinkers, which in turn develops them into shallow learners (10). As a highly qualified teacher, college prepared me to teach all subjects to

mastery, and not just teach, but sometimes I feel this can't be done with the overwhelming amount of criteria required to be taught.

I want to teach all that is required of me, but I want to teach it thoroughly so my students can be successful in life. Often, I feel I can't accomplish this because of the load on my plate. When I teach, I have a goal in mind. I want everyone in my class to understand as much as possible and leave my classroom learning something new every day. I want it to be meaningful and retained, not just something memorized for the time being.

How can we find the time to teach all that is required? Do we make the days longer? Do we add more days to the school year? Should our students be attending school year round? There are no simple answers to these questions, and I certainly don't know what will help this situation, but I do know that our teachers are being pushed over their limits, and it's taking a toll on them, as well as our students. Perhaps someone should take a good look at the amount of material being taught in a given year, and instead of teaching numerous lessons that last minutes, teach quality lessons that last a lifetime!

#### Works Cited

Gallagher, Kelly. "The Elephant in the Room." *Readicide*. Portland: Stenhouse Publishers, 2009. Print.

## Riding Mower Lesson 101

Believe it or not, I really enjoy cutting the grass. It's my quiet time to ride around the yard and "think." It was a beautiful Saturday morning and perfect for cutting the grass. As I went to the garage and got out the old riding lawn mower, I wondered how many more cuttings it would give me before it crashed and became precious metal for the local scrap yard. I checked the oil, filled it with gas, and slowly drove it out the door.

After cutting most of the two acres around my house, I decided it was time to take a break and get something to drink. The sun was rising higher, and my clothes were damp and dirty. I also wanted to awaken both my teenage girls to see if I could get a little help from them. My oldest, Felicia, was still asleep, but the younger one, Jacquelyn, offered to help, if she could ride the mower. I was hesitant to agree to this, but I thought maybe she was old enough, thirteen to be exact, to handle the mower on the level parts of our yard.

After cooling off a bit, Jacquelyn and I went outside for her first official riding mower lesson. The mower was parked in the driveway facing the side of our house. She quickly climbed onto the driver's seat, and I sat on the narrow fender beside her. (I forgot to mention it, but our mower was a five-speed and had no brakes.) I explained all the features of the mower, and her teenage knows-more-than-mom reply was, "I know, Mama. I know how to do it!" I reminded her that the mower had no brakes, she was not a race car driver, and she had to let her foot off the clutch very slowly or the mower would stall. With the usual roll of the eyes that I've seen thousands of times before, she replied, "I've got it! I know what to do!"

Jacquelyn quickly cranked the mower and got ready to take off. Before I could get the words out of my mouth about easing off the clutch, she instantly removed her foot as the mower jerked into high gear. Until then I never knew I was flexible enough to do somersaults as I catapulted off the back of the mower in one swift second. Without checking to see how many bones I had cracked or how much blood I had lost, I frantically sprang back onto my feet to catch her heading straight towards our house. Without hesitation, I sprinted after her and grabbed the back of the mower trying to stop her from hitting our house—too late—Jacquelyn and the mower were jerking sporadically back and forth into the side of the house, but this time, she was pleading for help and crying, “Mama, I can’t stop it. What do I do?” Laughing hysterically, tears running down my face, I was yelling, “Turn off the key! Turn off the key!” After turning off the mower, she quickly and quietly jumped off the mower and looked straight into my eyes as she firmly stated, “I don’t want to cut grass anymore.”

That was several years ago. I am waiting patiently for Jacquelyn, sixteen and driving her own vehicle now, to sign up for Riding Mower Lesson 102. Until then, I will continue to mow the lawn on Saturday mornings and enjoy my quiet time to ride around the yard and “think”; only now, it will be done on my shiny new riding mower with **automatic** transmission and **excellent** brakes!



## **JULIE HIGDON**

The road not taken . . . been there!



### **The Most Wonderful Time of the Year**

When I was growing up, Christmas at my house was the tops. I have such fond memories of all the special things my family did together. Those memories are ones that each year I try to rekindle from my childhood, but somehow they are never the same as the actual experience. I guess that's why I reflect with sadness upon a time that has passed, but also with joy for a memory that no one can ever take away.

I never realized how hard my poor mother worked until I got married and experienced how much work went into preparing a meal and the house for company. Boy, is that stuff for the birds! My mother would begin the first part of December deep cleaning and decorating the house to prepare for the holidays. She always made pecan and chocolate pies from scratch, all the way down to the crust, an art that I have yet to master.

My brothers, sisters, and I would go down into the woods behind our house and cut a cedar tree to decorate. There were six of us, so we would bundle up to go out and look for the perfect tree. When you're outside, somehow the trees look a lot smaller than they do in a house. Once, my brother and I cut a tree, probably twenty feet tall, thinking it would work in our living room. Needless to say, we wound up having to cut the top part of the tree off to serve our purpose. No bother, though, my mother taught us not to waste, so we used pieces of the greenery on the bottom branches to decorate around various Christmas displays my mother had put throughout the house.

On Christmas Eve, I would keep a watch out our living room window for my Aunt Ruby and her family to arrive. When I would see their beige Cutlass Supreme

pulling into the drive, I would run through the house like a messenger sounding the trumpet, "Aunt Ruby is here! They're here!" Their family drove in from Atlanta, and we always spent our childhood Christmases together. The guests didn't stop here, though; we still had to await Aunt Nancy and her son, Mack, and my Aunt Deborah, who practically grew up with us.

Once, they were there, we had relatives who lived near us who would come over on Christmas Eve for a night of snacks and games. My dad and my uncles, along with a few older cousins, would take turns playing Rook. A novice would never want to step into Rook territory because this group played for blood. The girls spent a great deal of time in the bathroom, sitting on all of the facilities, just talking. I would keep a watch on the time, for when it started getting around midnight, I wanted the guests to either settle in for the night or leave so that Santa Claus could come.

When things died down for the evening, several of us would gather my mother's dining room and kitchen chairs and arrange them in the living room. We would place a piece of masking tape on each chair and write each child's name on the tape. This is where Santa Claus would leave our goodies. There were nine children and six adults that spent the night at our house, so putting names on the chairs saved the time of distributing gifts on Christmas, not to mention that it allowed us to see what Santa brought us quicker. Although there were a lot of us kids, I can never remember being disappointed with my gifts.

After things died down and everyone was in bed, Santa would come. Between three and five o'clock in the morning, the youngest of us would wake up to peek and see if Santa had come. If he had, we would run through the house and wake

everyone up yelling, "Santa Claus has come! Santa Claus has come!" The poor old Santas that had spent hours cooking, cleaning, and playing Rook a few hours earlier would drag out of bed to insure we believed for another year. We tore into our gifts, jumping with excitement, comparing what we had gotten to the others' gifts. Once the excitement had died down, the adults and older kids would go back to bed, but we younger ones were too excited to sleep. So, we played and played and played.

Now that I have children of my own, I put chairs out with their names on them so that Santa can leave presents. The excitement is still good, but not the same as I felt in a house filled with all of these guests. Christmas is the most wonderful time of my childhood memories. The thing that made it so special to me was the closeness of my family ties. I catch myself now trying to capture the joy of my childhood during the holidays, but as things change, life is never the same. If I could pass some part of my heritage to my children, one thing would be the love and closeness of my family ties.

### Little Eddie

Classroom management is something that seems to take experience to conquer. Sure, new teachers come out of college with fresh ideas and the mentality that they can handle every student, but that isn't reality. During my first year as a teacher, I learned that all students have unique personalities with different needs.

When I began my first year teaching, I was asked, just as most new teachers are, to do several tasks outside of the classroom to help out. One of these tasks was keeping students who had been assigned afternoon detention. I was delighted to do this, for being a new teacher, I wanted to get my name out there and be known as one that could handle classroom discipline. As most people know, if a student has gotten to the point of afternoon detention, he/she probably doesn't take discipline very well anyway.

On my first day, I had three boys, two of whom tormented me from the time they walked in the room. I spoke harshly to them and scolded them for their improper behavior, but it only made them worse. They talked back and got worse every time I tried to control them. Finally, at the end of detention, I decided they would have to come another day for misbehaving. At the end of that day, I was ready to quit and never come back.

I spoke to the father of one of the boys, and he handled his son. It was really nice to have that parental support; however, the other boy was a different story. I began to talk to our reading coach about this child. She told me some things about his home life, and my anger began to change to sorrow. I realized that he had deeper issues, and that, perhaps, I had handled him improperly. I decided that I needed to do things differently the next time he came to detention.

The day arrived; Eddie was to spend the afternoon with me. I heard him as he came down the hall.

“Where is afternoon detention today?”

“It’s in Ms. Higdon’s room.”

“I hate that woman. I’ll go anywhere but her room.”

“Sorry, that’s where you have to go.”

When Eddie entered my room, I used my new approach on him. I welcomed him to my room and told him that I loved him. He let me know really quickly that the love wasn’t returned, and he didn’t like me. It was no bother to me, for I knew before the end of that day, I would conquer him. I let him know that it didn’t matter that he didn’t love me; I loved him anyway.

First, I put him to work dusting my baseboards and cleaning my whiteboards. Every little bit, I would sing him a song that I had heard on *That’s So Raven*. The words are, “Can you feel it? Can you feel the love? Nothing feels better when you’re feeling the love.” Eddie acted like he hated this, but I could tell he was enjoying the attention. When he finished cleaning, I asked him to write a long apology letter for misbehaving and winding up in detention. He was to copy this letter over and over, signing it, “Love, Eddie.”

He began to write the letter but stopped to inform me that he would do it, but had no intentions of signing it with “love.” He wanted to use “like” instead. I let him know that was fine and would just look at him every few minutes and sing another bar of my “love song.” Each time I did, he let me know that he hated it and asked me to please stop. He was really loving it; I could tell.

After time had passed, Eddie began to grow tired of writing and looked up at me through humbled eyes.

“Ms. Higdon, how many times do I have to copy this letter?”

“ . . . Until those likes turn to love.”

“I can fix that right now!”

Eddie immediately began signing, “Love, Eddie,” and on that day, he found out that I was his friend.

After a few days had passed, the teacher across the hall came to me and said that Eddie had written a Valentine poem about me that professed his love and stated someday he would marry me. Then, Eddie came to me in the hall and asked me to be his date to the Valentine dance. Of course, I informed him that I had to work the gate, but to please save a dance for me. While working the dance, I heard the D.J. announce that the guys were to pick their girls for the next dance. He came to get me, so I made his day by giving him a dance.

The rest of that year, he would come by my room and ask to stay with me. He would offer to clean or do anything I needed him to do. That year, Eddie and I both made a new friend. However, Eddie had taught me that each one of my students had different needs, not just in their learning styles, but in their discipline as well.

### **Stardom**

Some people need attention more than others and seek out after it at all costs. In their mind, they have fantasies of being things like a big, famous movie star or singer. That isn't me. I have always been perfectly happy just being one of the girls. Sure, I am a prankster and love having fun, but if it is something that draws a lot of attention to me, I had rather not be involved. Although my wishes are not to stand out, my wishes aren't always granted. Little did I know that when I was least expecting it, I would become the one that literally stole the show, and to make matters worse, my stardom came during our annual church Christmas cantata.

Every year, our church has a Christmas program of some kind. This particular year, the choir thought it would be a wonderful idea to have a live, singing Christmas tree. We had done this before, but not since the church had been remodeled. The choir worked so hard on the music and decorations. When it came time to assemble the wooden high risers that formed the tree, we realized that while remodeling the church, the men had felt it might be a good idea to bolt the back benches near the pulpit to the floor, so our tree wouldn't fit flush against the wall anymore. This wasn't a big deal to us, and we decided the show must go on.

The night of the program, we all dressed similarly and carried battery-operated candles as we marched in the church to take our places in the tree. The music was going wonderfully, and the crowd seemed to be enjoying the program. The choir was singing as our precious little children acted out the nativity scene. I was about four levels up in the tree, close to the rear, when I decided I would be a little more comfortable if I could just turn sideways a little. When I began to turn, I lost my balance and began to fall. The

guy next to me, luckily a lifelong friend, grabbed my arm and hand to try and help me. For about a split second I thought, "Matt is going to help me." Then I realized if I held on to his hand, I was going to pull him off on top of me, along with about ten or fifteen other choir members. So, finally, I let go and fell out of the tree, down several feet, hitting my badonkadonk on the bench that our good men had bolted down.

Matt looked down at me and was trying not to laugh while he discreetly whispered in a voice of concern, "Are you okay? Are you hurt? Are you hurt?" When I had oriented myself back to life, I started laughing hysterically. When Matt saw I was okay, he too began to laugh, and so did Shannon, the guy on the other side of Matt. Still laughing hysterically, I finally got out the words, "I am fine; you guys keep singing. Just keep singing." I didn't want to draw any more attention to myself. The loud boom of my bottom had already drawn enough attention to last me a lifetime.

While I was still sprawled out on the bench, Matt, Shannon, and the other choir members tried to hold it together long enough to finish the song. To make my laughter worse, Matt and Shannon were so tickled that they had put their sheet music up over their faces to cover their laughter. Little did those two goofs know that, although their faces were covered, the audience could still see that they were laughing because their bellies were jiggling like Santa Claus's belly. When all of our laughter had stopped and the show was over, the whole congregation was tickled and cracking jokes about the Christmas tree losing one of its angels. Although I didn't enjoy being humiliated, I must admit that it has been a conversational landmark for our church and one we still laugh about to this day.





# **GLORIA HORTON**

My only regrets-Roads not taken

## Where I'm From

I am from Peter Pan peanut butter, Almond Joys, and *Heidi*.

I am from the tri-level colonial...brick, white, and sturdy.

I am from wild honeysuckle, mossy streams, and  
Scampy's rose garden.

I am from family Christmases where Santa always came, from optimistic outlooks, from Richard  
and Evelyn, T. J., and Evan and Eve Ann.

I am from hugs and kisses and from sweet little voices saying,  
"I love you, Nanna."

From "You'd better be good, or the boogeyman will get you" and "Quitters never win."

I am from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost of the Apostles' Creed,  
from The United Methodist Church, "there must be a God somewhere," and  
"Kumbayah."

I am from Birmingham during its darker days, from England, heavy cake, and pasty, from lane  
cakes and mama's oatmeal.

I'm from the grandfather who emigrated from England at eighteen to escape Queen Victoria,  
Who went to work in the steel mills of Birmingham, becoming the neighborhood "personality"  
With his five-eleven frame, his hearing aid, his perpetual pipe filled with Prince Albert tobacco,  
and his tunes whose words always were some combination of "bum."

I am from the father who gave unlimited love to two little girls who were not his by blood and  
whose death I still mourn.

I am from tattered boxes of yellowed photos revealing a life filled with love, laughter, and fun,  
from photo albums and silver frames filled with pictures of my children and grandchildren,  
priceless tokens to a woman who has been lucky enough to have the best family and the dearest  
friends a person could have.

Without my family, I am from nowhere; with them, I am in paradise.

### One Way to Ruin a Party

In March 1975, when I was seven-and-a-half months pregnant, I found out, during a routine visit to my obstetrician that I was having not one, but two babies. In my heart, I had known I was carrying two babies from day one, but my doctors kept insisting I was just eating too much (I wasn't because I couldn't hold food down if I did eat it). I went back home to Scottsboro, having been told to quit my teaching job and take it easy for the next two months now that we knew I was going to have twins. And so I did. For a week, I did nothing but lie on the couch and watch television during the day and lie in the bed, tossing and turning, trying to get comfortable—as comfortable as someone who had gained over fifty pounds in seven months could get—every night. All I had to look forward to during that long, miserable week was my baby shower, being given by some of my friends in Birmingham, the next Sunday, March 23.

Sunday finally arrived, and my husband and I left for the two-hour drive to Birmingham, a drive normally made uninterrupted. On this day, however, we kept having to stop to find places for me to relieve the pressure on my bladder that every woman who has ever been pregnant can relate to. Even stopping several times didn't seem to make me feel better, and by the time we arrived in Cahaba Heights at the home where the shower was to be held, I still felt miserable. I wasn't worried, though; I was only a little bit over seven months pregnant, and my due date was April 28. I thought I was just tired from doing nothing for a week and then suddenly having to make a two-hour trip.

The shower lasted two hours. I opened lots of wonderful gifts, enjoyed the company of my friends as much as a whale who had to go to the bathroom every five minutes or so could, and somehow made it through the event until all the guests had left, leaving only the hostess, my mom, my sister, and me to rehash the events. That's when I finally got over my embarrassment enough to say, "I don't know what's wrong with me; I can't seem to stop going to the bathroom, and my pee is pink."

That's all I had to say before everyone around the table jumped into action. My friend, Diane, who had a three-year-old son said, "Oh, my goodness! Your water has broken. You probably need to go to the emergency room."

My mom and sister then chimed in together, "Let's get you down to the car! We'll have to go pick up T.J. and your daddy before we can go to Brookwood."

They helped me down the forty or so steps to where my mom's yellow station wagon was parked at the bottom of the hill, and we drove from Cahaba Heights to Eastwood Gardens in record time. Once we got to the house, we picked up my husband and my dad and made our way back toward Brookwood Hospital. My sister decided to follow in her own vehicle, so we had a mini-caravan by the time we reached the hospital.

When we got there and pulled up in front of the emergency room, as I got out of the car, I happened to look up to where a group of nurses was standing in front of a huge window on the second floor of the hospital, pointing at me and laughing. I know I was a funny sight in a dress that would not quite go around my middle, waddling toward the ER. I'm sure I made the AFLAC duck look good with my clumsy gait.

That morning, when T.J. and I left Scottsboro, I certainly never intended to have two children by the end of the day, and I certainly did not want to ruin my baby shower by spending so much time in the bathroom, but I did both things, and ruining that party gave me the best things that ever happened to me—my twins, Evan and Eve Ann. I still can recall how embarrassed I was by my own naiveté in not knowing when my water broke and in my becoming a bit of comedy for a group of onlookers at Brookwood Hospital, but my most embarrassing moment was also one of the best times of my life, and I would do it all over again if I could.





# **JESSE KENNEDY**

People say I'm weird . . . So what?

### Where I'm From

I am from Cool Whip and Kool-Aid, where the bowls are fine china.

I am from the shack in the woods...Southern, rustic, smells like Confederacy.

I am from the dogwood tree, its flowering branch, smells like home, the pine trees, pine cones, smell like a clean kitchen.

I am from the Church of God and piety and conservative dress and women with long hair, wearing dresses, no makeup or jewelry, and men wearing pants and neatly trimmed hair, from Uncle Billy Clyde and Aunt Bonnie Faye.

I am from a hot temper and blind passion.

From boys will be boys and girls will get married and have children.

I am from my grandmother's bedside reading Bible stories and singing "no, no, a thousand times no, Jesus will never say no." She always knew what to say.

I'm from Cropwell and Galway, collards and buttermilk.

From the cotton fields of Alabama that toughened my mother's hands so, the kerosene that nearly poisoned Uncle Billy, the gangrene that took grandma's legs.

I am from those old photo albums underneath the bed.

From a dying culture.

Just memories.

### Frustration

A seasoned teacher once asked me, "So, when did YOU graduate?"

It was my first day on the job---EVER.

"May 2008," I responded.

With a sneer, she countered, "Well, I'll be! How old are you?" (knowing good and well if I had asked her the same thing, she would have been offended!)

"Twenty-two...."

"EVERYONE: We have us a BABY!" she announced.

This happens to me almost everywhere I go professionally. Frankly, I am sick of it. Just because I am not as old as dirt... Just because I didn't know Jesus personally... I am a person—not an age.

But, I digress. Many thoughts crossed my mind that day, dismal thoughts. However, I turned to my blog...

*oh, what we once were,*

*children born into unsuspecting freedom,*

*reminiscent of days long gone,*

*innocence lost...*

*f*

*o*

*r*

*e*

*v*

*e*

*r*



### **Revenge is a Dish Best Served Muddy**

Her name was Amy, and she had it all. Gorgeous hair, perfect skin, nice figure--- It was just like looking at a Botticelli angel, or so I thought. She was the embodiment of sheer, unadulterated beauty. These thoughts crossed my mind on a daily basis, but that is where they stayed—on the inside. On the outside, I hated her, couldn't stand her, wished her dead—my nemesis, my competition. She sang in the choir with me, made straight A's like me, and made my life a living heck.

Everyday before church, I would hear her remark, "And then, he asked me to the dance. My life is just where I want it to be!"

In the mire is where her life would be if I had my say. I prayed daily that God would move her to another state, another PLANET. As long as the Lord took her away, no one had to get hurt. Finally, one day I had had enough. God wasn't going to answer my prayer, and I needed to take matters into my own hands.

The morning of Amy's dedication to membership of the local church, I decided. It had been raining for days, but on the morning of Amy's dedication, God decided to open up the cloud and sprawl a rainbow across the sky. "What can I do?" I asked myself over and over...GOT IT! Amy's dress was the pinnacle of couture, made by the Emanuels themselves. It was white, flowing, ruffled, and tea length...before the accident.

"Amy! Come look! You will never believe this," I proclaimed with urgency.

"What is it this time, Jessica?" she countered.

"You have to see it to believe it," I said.

As Amy came closer to the pit of Alabama peanut butter red clay mud, I devised it precisely. She wasn't going to outwit me any time in the present or future.

"Look closer...Closer...CLOSER!" I urged.

"What...is...it...AAAAAH!!!" She screamed.

"QUICK! Somebody help! It's Amy," I guffawed.

At this point, several members of the congregation had come outside to see what the matter was, or as my Aunt Francis would say, "to be nosey." My Uncle Billy, the reverend, went to help Amy out of the mud.

"What on Earth happened, Amy?" he said.

".....YOOOOOU!" she muttered as she leaped towards me with the intent to kill.

"What did you do?" Uncle Billy accused. He spoke as if there wasn't a doubt in his mind.

"It was an accident." No sooner had I gotten the words out of my mouth when Uncle Billy took his belt off and started whaling on me like I was his stepchild.

I had to sit in the back of the church and watch as Amy was solaced by the members, welcomed openly. And there I sat...punished, back to square one. But, I didn't care; it was worth every beating, every snarled word, grimace. I had vengeance. I was...satisfied.

Fin.



## **LISA LIGHT**

Find your passion and pursue it

## Where I'm From

I am from catching fireflies,  
in the warmth of summer's dusk.  
I am from a football *and* hair curlers under the Christmas tree  
(at the awkward age of twelve).  
I am from eating watermelon,  
fishing from Uncle Wayne's pier,  
while slapping away gnats and giant mosquitoes,  
waiting for the bobber to give me a sign.

I'm from school rooms with no air conditioning,  
from Gogey Gygey and Dobba Doo.  
I'm from *Little House on the Prairie*  
and Thursday nights with *The Waltons*.  
I'm from "You better straighten up and fly right!" and  
"Lisa Lou, you're gonna dry up and blow away."

I'm from guitar pickers and annoying little sisters,  
sweet tea, fried okry, and corn bread,  
from Maw Maw's house on Sunday afternoons,  
under the Mimosa tree shellin' peas.  
In my closet was a Barbie box,  
brimming with Barbie clothes and Ken  
(without a head; my sister pulled it off).

I am from those moments —  
Embedded in my Southern soul —  
I'm from...me!

### Googling and Tubing

Need to know how to tie a tie? What about the lyrics to your new favorite song? What are the steps to the latest dance craze? Suppose your cat begins acting weirder than normal, and you want to talk with other cat owners about it...fast! It's summertime, and you've just caught a glimpse of your backside in the mirror. Ughhh! How do I get rid of cellulite? Where do lost e-mails go? What's the meaning of life?

Fret no more – the search is over! The answers to these questions and more may be quickly answered with a mere point and click of a mouse, a computer mouse, that is. In just a few seconds and using a few key words, I can Google (now considered a verb) any of the above questions and find an answer. Pronto! If I want to view a video clip, YouTube (referred to as “tubing”) is the way to go. Google.com and YouTube.com have become two of my newest and best friends, my “go to” friends when I need immediate answers.

As a classroom teacher, I must consider the teaching implications due to my students' increased use of multimedia technologies. I realize that my students learn differently from the way I learned in school. According to Herrington, Hodgson, and Moran, those of us born before the 1970s are known as “newcomers” in the world of multimedia. That includes me. Those born after the 1970s, which include our children and our students, are “insiders” (7). My research experiences as a student in school consisted of learning how to use the Dewey Decimal System and card catalog so that I could locate a resource in a library, lugging a five pound *World Book Encyclopedia* around, and spending hours thumbing through a *Readers Guide to*

*Periodical Literature* only to be directed to another source, which might or might not be housed in the library. All this required leg work, time, patience, and the ability to know how and where to search. I hated research assignments. However, now that I think about it, it wasn't the assignment or the writing that I loathed – it was the research.

Now, students, me included, can research almost anything, while lounging in pajamas in the convenience of our homes any time of the day or night. I'm simply amazed at the amount of work I can accomplish while lying on my sofa in the evenings, laptop propped on my legs, fingers pointing, clicking, and accessing information from all over the world. For example, one of my cats has begun to drag out socks, t-shirts, dish towels, and other cloth items that I've left lying within her reach. I often come home after work and find a trail of socks lining the floor. What's her problem? She's never done this before. So, I Googled it. After logging on to [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) and typing in the phrase *cat dragging out clothes*, I hit the jackpot! All sorts of posts from cat owners and veterinarians with the same problem immediately popped up. After reading a few blogs and postings, I quickly surmised that my cat is not that weird after all. Lots of cats do this for reasons only cats know. I felt much better knowing that my cat is not the only cat with a sock fetish.

As a teacher, I L-O-V-E Google. I don't know how I ever taught without it. When students ask me a question to which I may not know the answer, I've never had a problem with the old adage, "I'm not sure; let me check it out and I'll get back with you later." With Google at my fingertips, now I can say, "Hey, let's check it out right now." I type in a few keywords, project the Web site on our classroom interactive

whiteboard, and BADA-BING, BADA BOOM! There we have it. “Later” has become “right now.”

I’ve also learned that YouTube is not just a Web site where teenagers post stupid videos of themselves. However, if one ever needs to know how to drink milk and squirt it out your eye, then YouTube is the place to visit. Check out this link, if you dare: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQ0xXmB9uJI>. A young girl of middle school age proudly displays her eye squirting abilities, while Dad sits in the background obviously aware. How proud he must be!

On a more practical note, what if you desperately need to learn a certain dance (i.e., the tango)? No problem. Go to [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and type: *beginners tango*. You and your to-be tango partner can teach yourselves in the privacy of your own home before you make fools of yourselves on the dance floor. Speaking of dances, what about learning the Stanky Leg dance? Yes, “Do da Stanky Leg.” If you teach middle or high school students, you must at least be familiar with the popular song titled “Stanky Leg” as well as the dance to go along with it. Being the hip and cool middle school teacher that I am, I want to be “down with it,” knowing the songs and current dances my students talk about.

Recently, with no students around, a group of fellow teachers and I bravely and curiously checked out the Stanky Leg dance using YouTube. We were greeted by hundreds of videos posted by countless teens and even adults, all “doin da Stanky Leg” to a song with a catchy hip-hop beat. I kept thinking, “Hey, I really like this song. Cool beat. Even I can dance to this.” As we clicked on the first link and began watching, it appeared the dancers were shaking their legs as if they had stepped in

dog-doo. Well, I've stepped in dog-doo before and created a few dance steps of my own. I could have started this dance craze. However, after watching several videos, I soon learned that the dance consists of more than shaking your legs. Some versions reflected more booty shaking than leg shaking. Hmmmm. Although I didn't have the nerves, coordination, or flexibility to practice the Stanky Leg in front of my peers, I did go home and practice it later. No one was at home other than the cats and, let me tell you, they were not impressed! These were moves that I wouldn't want my mama or grandmother see me doing, so I decided to modify the dance and just do the leg shaking part. I should also note that I Googled the song lyrics. Whoa, Nellie! Word up...Parents, teachers, and students (if you're reading this), be aware that some of the lyrics are explicit, and I'm not condoning them. However, I do like the beat, and the title of the song is certainly catchy. (I wonder if there are any "clean" lyrics? Think I'll Google it.)

On a more serious note, I have found numerous video clips on *YouTube* that are classroom appropriate, only to find that our school's computer firewall protection system blocks any access to YouTube. This situation has brought up a dilemma: as a classroom teacher, I should be able to use my professional discretion and have immediate access to instructional tools that I deem important to supplement my lessons. Right? A video clip of Ray Bradbury explaining how he developed Clarisse's character in *Fahrenheit 451* is certainly classroom appropriate for my 7<sup>th</sup> grade English students. I recently spent hours one night searching several Web sites only to find what I needed on YouTube. Knowing that I couldn't access YouTube at school, I had to research how to convert a YouTube audio/video file into a file format



that my school computer would accept, plus save it on my flash drive. Forty-seven steps later around 11:30 P.M., mission accomplished!

So I thought. The next morning at school, I popped in my flash drive to test the file only to receive a message stating the “file cannot be found.” After several attempts to fix the problem, I tracked down my school’s IT person and asked for temporary access to YouTube. “No can do,” he abrasively replied. “If I release it for you, then every student in the school will have access to YouTube.” After I valiantly explained my late-night attempts to capture the video clip, how important it was to my lesson, and how I should be able to use professional discretion in the classroom via YouTube, he showed no sympathy. Lessons learned: 1. Although YouTube can be a viable classroom resource, most schools block access. 2. There are ways to convert YouTube file formats into media formats acceptable by most school computers. You can Google how to do it. 3. Remain friendly with your school’s IT person (no matter how much he or she may tick you off).

The world is no longer the same. If you are reading this, it is likely that you grew up reading books and newspapers and watching programmed television. Our students are learning about the world via a different kind of text, audio and visual media available twenty-four hours a day. The amount of information and content is growing in the world, and learners need immediate access to it. From searching information, collaborating, and sharing information, Google and YouTube can be your friends, as they are mine. I’m happy to share them with you. However, as for getting rid of cellulite and finding the meaning of life, Google and YouTube have let me down. ☺

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### **Ziplining in Jamaica**

I admit it. I've never been an "outdoorsy" kind of girl. I don't like camping, hiking, or even working in the yard. I don't like to sweat or re-do my hair right after I've spent thirty minutes styling it. I don't like bugs or any kind of wildlife critters. Honestly, the only time I'm happy outside is when I'm lounging beside my pool wearing a big floppy hat and sipping a fruity mixed drink.

However, I recently let down my outdoor inhibitions and enjoyed a fabulous vacation in Jamaica with my husband of twenty-nine years and my sister and her family. I surprised myself by venturing away from the pool and those delicious island mixers to participate with my family in some "real" outdoor activities. We snorkeled, zoomed through a lush tropical forest riding the Jamaican bobsled, and climbed up Dunns River Falls. However, the most memorable part was ziplining through Jamaica's Mystic Mountain rainforest canopy, a looming 700 feet above sea level. Yes, I forgot about sweating and my messed up hairdo. So what? I was on vacation!

Before embarking on a twenty-minute chairlift to the top of the mountain, we signed a waiver and release form; I suppose we waived and released our lives to the Jamaican gods. Then we met our certified guides, who quickly showed us the ropes (I mean, the cables) for a successful zipline ride. Although they joked around and were hysterically funny, our guides became serious when it came to safety and instructions, which helped relieve some of my fears. After being fitted with harnesses, cable hooks, and helmets, we were on our way.

To reach the first of five tree-to-tree zip lines, we hiked (yes, I hiked) through a narrow and winding trail lined with natural ferns and tropical plants, which led us higher into the Jamaican rainforest. When we reached the first zipline platform, I anxiously watched as each of my family members zipped away yelling, “Go, Mon! Yeah! This is soooooo cool!”

My heart was pounding, and I was scared out of my mind – not for them, but for me! However, it was soon my turn. It was just my sweet and trusty zipline guide and I standing atop Platform A, and the only way to get to Platforms B through E was to hook myself to the zipline, let go, and enjoy the ride. And that’s exactly what I did.

I’ve never been an adrenaline junkie, but as my stomach jumped to my throat, I surprisingly heard myself yell, “Whooohhhooooo!” Absolutely breathtaking and exhilarating! I even touched some of the foliage as I zipped through the rainforest canopy. I didn’t care if a bug flew in my mouth, nor did I care that my hair was mashed flat under my helmet. I was outside and having the time of my life.

Even though I still prefer the indoors and all its amenities, I now have a new appreciation for the great outdoors. Would I do the zipline again? Absolutely. Would I recommend it to my other girly and primpy friends? Only if they promise not to complain if they break a nail. Family is precious. Life is precious. So what if I sweat a little? Adventure is out there, and it’s waiting for me. Wait...don’t I have a hair appointment today?



**JOY MALONEY**

**Writing Project: food, writing, technology, fellowship**

### **Where I'm From**

I am from the summer,  
from bicycles and the Beatles.  
I am from long days outside without air conditioning  
(We roamed the neighborhood  
looking for shade and sprinklers.)  
I am from the plum tree,  
the blackberry bush,  
the squash blossom and its miraculous fruit.

I am from growing what you eat,  
From Pat and Leora and Edd  
I'm from daily letter writers and challenged readers,  
From get your nose out of that book to let's go to the library.  
I'm from Vacation Bible School  
and Civil Rights marches with the priest.

I'm from the McKays and Hatchett Creek Church,  
From tea cakes and fried okra.  
From my granny and the wildcat,  
And a computer as big as a basement.  
Under the black paint of my dresser  
We found beautiful golden oak,  
The secret treasure of a tree from another time  
crafted by a man whose name  
we do not know.

I am from millenniaums,  
A thread unspooling through time  
Pausing each generation to quilt another square.

### Lassie Stay Home

When I was growing up, my family always had dogs, but they were invariably small, short haired, and not very attractive in general. You know the type: the typical southern yard dog that comes in various uninteresting colors and shapes, fiercely loyal and kept strictly outside. I always swore that I would have a different kind of dog for my children when I grew up: long-haired, beautiful, brilliant, and kept inside so that my children wouldn't have to endure those long nights when the dog could be heard outside howling at the moon or doing other doggy things instead of participating in the lives of his human family. Much of this image of the ideal canine companion came from the TV. I watched Lassie and Timmy every week, and every program increased the conviction that here was the dog of my dreams. Once again I learned the difference between the dream world of television fiction and the cold reality of life without a second "take" or revised draft when we actually got a collie of our own.

When our daughter Julia was three years old, we decided that it was time for a family dog. A family in Piedmont was advertising collies for sale, so we picked one out, brought him home, named him Atticus (after another favorite fictional character), and treated him like a member of the family. Things went pretty much along the lines of the TV show for a number of years: this dog was smart, he was beautiful, and he loved the children without reservation. He made no distinction between them—he slept in or beside the bed of whoever went to sleep first, and he was even observed placing himself between our adventurous daughter and the potential danger of the street and the pond. It was after we moved from our subdivision house to our rural property three and a half miles away that we learned the extent of this dog's loyalty and, perhaps, the

limitations of his intelligence.

We had been in our new house for about a week when we got the first telephone call. It was our former next door neighbor, a wonderful woman who was attending classes at night.

“Hey, Joy, um, are any of ya’ll over at your old house?”

“No, why?” was my confused response.

“Well, do you know where Atticus is?”

“He’s right here-no, wait-he is NOT right here!” I felt panic akin to that of losing track of one of my young children.

“That’s because he’s over in the yard at your old house, trying to get in the fence! He came over and greeted me as I was getting out of my car, but he’s back over there now. Just thought you might have missed him,” she replied. I could hear the big grin on her face.

Someone had let the dog out without supervision, and he had traveled almost four miles, down Highway 204, across the JSU campus, and returned to our old house in Jacksonville. In less time than it had taken for us to miss him.

We retrieved him and tried to explain to him that “this is where we live now,” but this same thing happened at least three more times. The clincher was when we got a phone call from the Jacksonville City Police Department, who had gotten a call from the teenage daughter of the people who bought our old house. She had called to report that a “wolf” was “trying to break down the front door,” and she was home alone and terrified. She wasn’t a very good sport when we tried to explain that it was just our sweet old Atticus, too dumb and too loyal to give up the place where he had grown



up. We were finally able to convince him to stay home through two purchases: a kennel with eight foot panels and a female collie puppy.

Atticus is not with us any more, but he remains a source of stories for me and my family. They say that truth is often stranger than fiction, and while Atticus wasn't as perfect as Lassie, he was always entertaining—just in a different way.

### From Symbol to Story: A Unit on Family Heritage

You know all about emoticons, right? They are those little symbols that appear in today's online writing, designed to convey an idea or emotion without words. Some of them are provided by the computer, like the smiley face that is one of your options when using a certain Instant Messaging program, and some are combinations of symbols that have been used previously for other purposes, such as the colon and a single parenthesis to convey same smiley face. In typing this, I have learned that my computer automatically interprets those punctuation marks in sequence as a smiley, thus: : plus ) = ☺. This kind of symbolic representation has been embraced by the online generation (and those who aspire to communicate with them) as an innovative shorthand, a way to convey emotions and group identity without the necessity of verbal detail. Students might be intrigued to learn that this kind of symbolic shorthand has been around for a very long time—in fact, since preliterate times, when sometimes the recognition of a visual symbol indicating clan affiliation could mean the difference between life and death. The creation of an individual coat of arms can generate many, many words (maybe not a thousand) in the writing classroom as part of a unit on heritage, oral history, and individual identity.

In her book Writing Your Heritage: A Sequence of Thinking, Reading, and Writing Assignments, former Writing Project participant Deborah Dixon describes an entire freshman composition writing sequence based upon the ideas of cultural, familial, and individual heritage. She begins with the family tree and related writing assignments, continues with the coat of arms, and concludes with research-based writing

projects derived from previous writing assignments. Since her students come from widely varied cultural backgrounds, she is able to do much with the experiences of immigration and assimilation. For those of us who teach in the American South, many of our students have similar genealogical backgrounds: most are either African-American or descendants of European immigrants. Consequently, some of the assignments in Dixon's sequence are not appropriate for our students. Furthermore, teachers must be aware of the limitations and abilities of their own students and grade levels. However, elements of Dixon's program can be adapted to any age with good results. Some activities that might best produce interesting writing assignments are the family tree, the coat of arms, and the oral history interview project.

When introducing the family heritage writing unit, a teacher might first lead students in a discussion about symbols and their significance in culture today. Examples of emoticons and national flags may help students understand the way pictures have always been used to convey ideas without language. Students might then be led to discuss unwritten symbolism that is expressed through the use of the body. Examples might range from the "secret signs" that indicate membership in a particular historical group like the Masons (draw on the recent movie Angels and Demons if your students have seen it) to "gang signs" shared by some more contemporary groups. All of these nonverbal symbols imply the same thing: inclusion or membership in a group that does not include everyone. After examples and discussion of this kind, students may be more prepared to represent their own personal symbols through the creation of an individual (or family) coat of arms.

The coat of arms project works most successfully when assigned after students

have done some research on their own family backgrounds so they can incorporate images that reveal common traits found in several generations. A family tree is helpful in this regard, since it requires most students to work with another family member to gain the information needed to fill out a genealogical chart or family tree. After completing the family tree, students may be more prepared to draw pictures that represent common interests or traits that have been passed down for several generations. Students often respond in a very positive way to these assignments since they provide the opportunity to learn more about a topic that is already familiar: their families. As noted by Jabari Mahiri in Shooting for Excellence: African-American and Youth Culture in New Century Schools, "acceptance [of an assignment or task] was more likely when students' personal knowledge was incorporated into instruction in conjunction with a responsive style of classroom discourse" (2). By beginning with basic family knowledge and enlarging it through interviews and research, students expand their knowledge about family and heritage, topics of great personal significance. By creating an individual coat of arms and explaining its elements, students are preparing verbally for the next stage of the project: the oral history interview.

It is usually a good idea to give students plenty of time to find a subject for their oral history interview. The preparation of the family tree will often lead to stories and references that a student may choose to follow up on in an interview. Students need instructions about proper interview etiquette, and care must also be taken not to intrude on the interview subject's privacy. In their book about teaching history through oral history interviews in the elementary grades, Monica Edinger and Stephanie Fins describe the problem: "The interviewees often wanted to help the children, but at the

same time didn't want to expose too much of their own lives" (62). When interview subjects are allowed to choose the story they share with their interviewer, the intrusive aspect is diminished, and when combined with a larger family history project, the purpose of recording the story—to preserve it for the next generation, within the family—can be made more acceptable.

Teachers can design writing assignments around all or only some of the elements of the unit on family heritage, and there are many assignments in other subject areas that can be also related to this unit. We can begin with the familiar-- with current visual symbolism and personal identity—and work backwards in time through family research and oral history. Students may be led to discover that people haven't changed that much—we all like to be included, family traits often show up in more than one generation, and there is nothing as good as a story well told.

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# **SHARON MEEKS**

Depending in the Lord Almighty

# Where I Am From

I am from my mother's womb  
 From the place where God did hide.  
 I am from above, and under my FATHER'S wings do I abide.  
 Fragile like glass and strong as an ox, at the same time.

I am from the plum trees and blackberry vines.  
 Whose vines grow wild and flourish all of the time.  
 I take all I can hold and fill my mouth—one fist full at a time.

I am from darkness and night  
 From berries to pears  
 I am from the lie and deceptions to the truth and the life,  
 From sad to content like day and night.

I am defeat and victory, from fear to peace from the words  
 I keep deep within me.  
 I'm from Arkansas to Seoul, Korea  
 Turnip greens to apple pie.

From the influence of all of my relatives  
 Founded in their love,  
 The hand of the Lord is on my life, his eyes are ever on me,  
 All day and all night.

Under my bed was the boogie man,  
 The alligator with teeth that would bite my feet.  
 A soft voice helped me to sleep "fear not to dream" dreams that caused me  
 To laugh in my sleep.

I am now from above  
 I know I was from beneath.  
 Today I will flourish with my family  
 God has given to me.

**Bio Poem**

Sharon

Flat Clearing

Song of Solomon Chapter 2:1

“I am the rose of Sha’r-on, and the Lily of the Valleys.”

Trinity – Pertaining to the Holy Trinity.

Praise – Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Trenton – The Town by the River Trent.

I am so grateful to God for giving me my children after years of fear

Who loves the Lord and everything He loves.

Who needs love, food, shelter, and clothing.

Who gives all she can.

Who fears God alone.

Who would like to see the good in everyone.

Who resides in Fort Payne, Alabama.

Meeks

– Scottish, from the Old English word meek, which

means *humble* or *merciful*.





**DAVID MYER**

There was a boy. Still is

### **If I Have to Explain**

Bikers, especially Harley riders, have a saying: "If I have to explain, you wouldn't understand." Not the most original saying, but it sums up the situation pretty well. A few short years ago, no one could have made me understand the allure of the apparently insane act of thundering down the highway straddling a big V-twin motor, protected only by denim, leather, and a rudimentary half-helmet.

Now I get it. Not only do I get it, but I have a hard time remembering when I didn't get it. My transformation from preppy university instructor to renegade, bad boy biker (well, sort of) has been rapid and, to my wife at least, baffling.

I understand her bewilderment at least as well as she understands my bewitchment by all things Harley. After all, every man is entitled to a mid-life crisis; mine, though, (if that's what it is) shows no sign of passing. The old cliché is that a woman marries a man thinking he'll change, and then he doesn't. But I have, and she's not convinced it's for the better.

It all started a few years ago as we were driving back from a trip to Savannah. My wife and I both love flea markets, antique shops, and thrift stores (we do, after all, have some things in common), so when we saw the signs for a large flea market in south Georgia, we looked at each other and said, "We're there!"

While flipping through a rack of old military clothes in a jumbled, dusty booth manned by a grizzled, tattooed guy who seemed profoundly uninterested in my presence, I found, in the very back, an ancient black leather motorcycle jacket, battered and scarred from countless miles on back roads and byways, interstates and two-lane blacktops. The asking price, scrawled in faded pencil on a dingy scrap of masking tape, was thirty

dollars; I offered twenty, and the deal was done. To this day I still wonder—why did I buy it? I had never owned a motorcycle and certainly had no need for the jacket.

I later learned that the wealthy gentleman who owned the flea market was a collector of vintage vehicles, several of which were displayed here and there on the property. Moments after buying the jacket, I was standing open-mouthed before a 1947 Harley-Davidson motorcycle. It was unrestored, had not been cranked in ages, and, like the jacket, proudly wore its years of road wear. But it was beautiful and romantic. It was a time machine, a moment frozen in history. No, I didn't buy it; it was not for sale, and had it been, I could not have afforded it. My wife finally grabbed my arm and pulled me away, but I was smitten.

Back home, I had recently become friends with a guy named W. T. who rode a Harley-Davidson Dyna Low Rider. He had been thinking of selling the bike, and for no apparent reason hit upon the notion that I should be the lucky buyer. I dutifully pointed out to him that I was not a biker, that I did not know how to ride a big bike, that my entire previous experience with motorcycles had consisted of a few turns on dirt bikes as a teen, and that one of those rides had terminated with my being launched over the handlebars as an airborne missile.

Undeterred, W. T. slapped me on the shoulder and earnestly reminded me of the need to "get back on the horse that threw you." As is so often the case in life, sound reasoning crumbled in the face of an enthusiastic cliché. Besides being an experienced rider, W.T. worked in the field of industrial safety. So who, he asked, was better qualified than he to give me riding lessons? Without waiting for my answer, he quickly laid out a plan whereby I would meet him in the parking lot of the local sports coliseum,

where there was plenty of room and were no obstructions “in case anything goes wrong.” This was all very reassuring. At least he didn’t say, “In case anything goes *horribly* wrong.”

As it turned out, W. T. was a patient, methodical, capable teacher. After demonstrating some basic techniques, he soon had me doing laps around the empty parking lot, a big, stupid grin splitting my face in two. Then, to my complete shock, he insisted I take the bike out on a country road by myself. This part is hard to explain to non-bikers. A Harley guy will almost never do this. For W. T. to trust his machine to a novice was pretty much unprecedented.

I was terrified, but I couldn’t chicken out—it’s a guy thing, I guess. I don’t remember much about the ride except I’m pretty sure I never got above 45 miles per hour, and I kept telling myself, “Don’t screw up! Don’t screw up!” Somehow, I didn’t. And I will always be grateful to W. T. for what he taught me.

But a few days later, to my astonishment, he decided not to sell me the bike. I was now in a serious fix—I had been given my first taste of chocolate, and then told I couldn’t have any more! Luckily, within a couple of weeks, another friend helped me find a nice used Harley in my price range. Still lacking confidence in my riding skills, I brought the bike home on the back of a pickup truck. The next day, W. T. rode over to my house on his Low Rider (which he later sold to another buyer) and accompanied me on my first ride. I’ve been hooked ever since.

Looking back on the chain of occurrences that led to my becoming a motorcyclist, I find it hard to believe that fate was not involved. From the moment I spied that old jacket, events seemed to take on a weird momentum of their own that seemed beyond my

ability to question or control. Or maybe that's just what we tell ourselves to rationalize our indulgences.

As for my wife, for now she seems resigned to being the wife of a biker. She no longer scolds me about my tattoo (well, hardly ever), and sometimes she even buys me Harley gear for Christmas and my birthday. But she still won't ride with me, and I'm pretty sure that if I ever refer to her as my "old lady," she'll have me killed and bring a date to my funeral.

### **Confessions of a Reluctant Online Instructor**

Statistics from the U. S. Department of Education confirm what most educators already know—that distance education, specifically online instruction, is a rapidly growing trend in this country (Hewett and Ehmann xii). One result of this explosive growth has been an increased demand for instructors to teach online courses. Some of these instructors teach exclusively online; others, such as I, teach both traditional and online courses.

I have been teaching online classes for a number of years now, and I must admit I have struggled at times with some of the inherent drawbacks of the online format, such as those pointed out by Leh and Jobin: difficulties with assessment, ethical considerations (are my students doing their own work?), and the lack of nonverbal communication and face-to-face interaction (90). I also concur with the general consensus among online instructors that the work is more time consuming than traditional classroom teaching. Certainly there also are advantages to online classes (89), but most of these seem weighted in favor of students, not faculty.

During a recent marathon online grading session, I found myself wondering (and not for the first time), “Why do I do it?” Here are some reflections from my own experience.

A few years ago, I was meeting with my department head for my annual end-of-academic-year review. The review was positive, and everything was going pretty much according to routine. As the interview was drawing to a close, my boss asked his usual end-of-meeting question: “Is there anything else you’d like to discuss?”

Only this time, instead of my typical “No, I guess that just about covers it,” out of the blue I said, “Well, since I’ve attended training sessions for the Blackboard online teaching platform, I thought I’d mention that if you’re ever in a pinch and need someone to teach an extra online section of Technical Writing, I might consider doing it. I mean, I might—that is, if the need should arise--which it probably won’t, of course. Anyway, thanks for your time.” We were shaking hands; I was standing at his office door, about to make my exit.

“Sounds good--how about next spring?”

As Jack Nicholson’s character says in *Terms of Endearment*, “I was just inches from a clean getaway!” (To which Shirley MacLaine replies, “Well, you’re stuck, so face it.”)

And I’ve been stuck teaching online classes ever since. Maybe “stuck” is a poor way to phrase it, especially considering how much I like my job overall and that I volunteered to teach online. No one’s holding a gun to my head, and no one’s asking me (thank goodness) to give up classroom teaching and exist only in cyberspace. I still have ample opportunities to work with a “live” audience.

But then I agreed to teach an extra online section of American Literature every fall and spring. In other words, in addition to my Technical Writing duties, I’ve taken on a perpetual online overload. This might be a good time to mention that I was almost totally lost at those Blackboard training sessions (something I neglected to bring up with my department head), that I’m in my fifties, and that I possess computer skills that the typical 12-year-old would disdain.

So why did I get myself into this? Why did I open my big mouth at that meeting?

Looking back now, I think part of the answer is that I am keenly aware of certain realities: first, I am a baby-boomer at mid-career; second, I hope to teach for at least another ten years, maybe fifteen; third, for the next ten to fifteen years, I will have to compete (in theory, if not in practice) with younger people who are willing to do my job for much less money; and finally, as I mentioned previously, the need for instructors to teach online classes has grown rapidly over the last several years and shows no signs of abating. Whether we like it or not, distance education will be a big part of what colleges and universities do for years to come. To quote T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "And in short, I was afraid"--afraid of growing old, afraid of being left behind, afraid of being rendered obsolete by technology. I wanted to be a part of the new guard, to wear multiple hats, to be a "go to" guy, to be indispensable to the firm (or university, in this case).

Early in my teaching career, a previous department head suggested to me that teaching Technical Writing was one way of establishing my place within the department—of staking out my territory, so to speak. It was sound advice, and perhaps by taking on the additional duties of teaching online, I am taking that advice a step further. Fortunately, I am receiving advice and inspiration from my fellow teachers as well: In the 2009 Writing Project Summer Institute, I picked up some great ideas for improving the distance learning experience, both for me and for my students. The hat of online instructor may never be my favorite one to wear, but as I have learned more, I find that I wear it a little more easily.



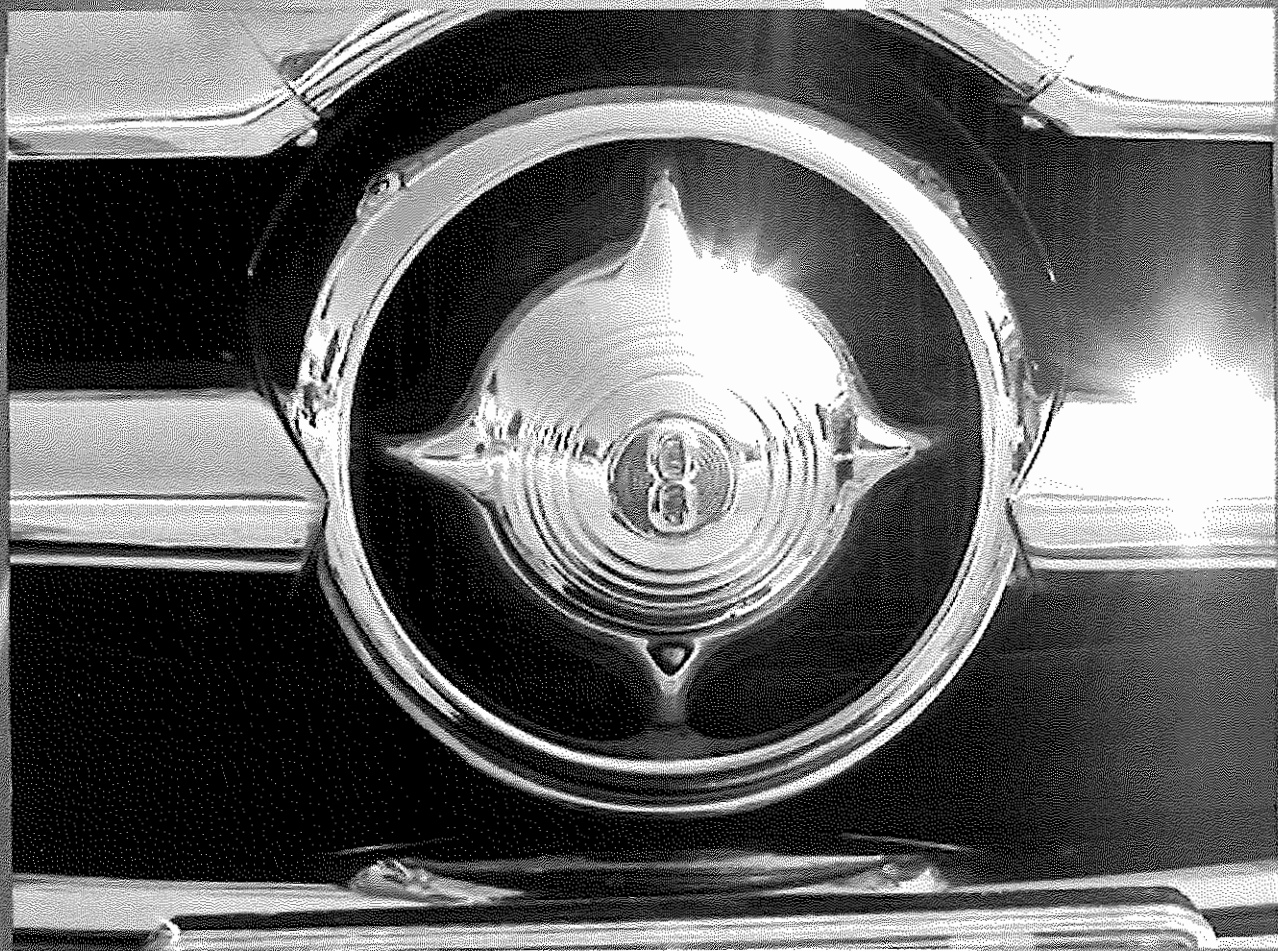
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# **JULIE SAMPLES**

Highly Spirited Physical Educator

## Where I'm From

I am from a music minister and school teacher  
 From piano music, hymn books, graded papers and stickers  
 I am from red dirt, rocks, and playing  
 Until I couldn't see my hands in front of my face  
 I am from crayons, markers, papers, and paints  
 Scissors and drawings – anything I could make.

I am from white sandy beaches, floats, sunblock, and hats  
 Gatlinburg candy shops, boutiques for this and that  
 I am from family trips, family prayers, family time  
 Just the three of us together our whole lives.

I am from "How Great Thou Art," Mozart, piano recitals, art class, and  
 choir  
 Cheerleading routines, basketball games, bus rides, boys, and friends  
 I am from weekends in the country with Mawmaw  
 Yard sales, feeding chickens, gathering eggs  
 Shuckin' corn and shellin' purple hulled peas  
 Cannin' maters, jams and jellies  
 I am from wild game for supper  
 It didn't bother me.

I am from family hugs, holding hands, kisses and loves  
 Encouragement and comfort, expressed through His love  
 Through high school, college, and college again  
 I am from divorce, remarriage, no grandchildren yet.

I am from the touch of two thousand hands  
 I am from "Good job!" "Stop that!" "Don't run!" and "Get in line!"  
 Tying shoes, fixing scrapes, pulling teeth  
 From hoops, nets, ropes, bats and balls  
 I do it all.

### **The Best Day Ever**

Amongst the stifling heat and humidity, I open car door after car door, giving welcomes and salutations to each parent, child, and sibling. I love living in Alabama but do not enjoy the August weather. Even in my shorts and school t-shirt, I still have beads of sweat running down every part of my body. Seven o'clock in the morning should not be this uncomfortable. As I greet students arriving for school, I already have a feeling of dread about the steamy, two-thirty loading time.

The first week of school is always tough for students and teachers, especially the new ones. It's always worse for the kindergartners. With "much wailing and gnashing of teeth," the parents and car rider staff get students out of their cars and successfully into the building. I can only imagine what is going on in the hallways, in the classrooms, and in the lunchroom at breakfast. Whoever thought it was a good idea to feed six hundred screaming kids under the age of ten at the same time anyway? By the time I finish getting these kids inside, I will not have a dry thread on me. I haven't even started physical education classes for the day! I hate to perspire so much! I don't know why I even bothered to shower this morning.

On the brighter side, I enjoy seeing the kids back at school. I do not remember growing this fast myself, although the closer I get to forty, the more I grow in perimeter. I hate my birthday being the first week of school! Well, there went another stressed-out parent dragging in a distraught kindergarten student. Even through streaming tears, the blonde-haired boy is still one of the most beautiful children I've ever seen. As the last cars drove away, I turned and looked at my assistant, who is also my best friend.

"I want one of those!" I said.

"I know, but you've still got time," Kim said.

"I don't know; I've fallen too far behind I think...waited too long." I replied.

"No, you haven't, don't be ridiculous!" she yelled back at me over a loud, clanging car muffler. "And we're gonna burn up today!"

"I know. I'm hot already! And that's easy for you to say. You are one year older than I am, and both of your kids are in college!" I grimaced with my reply. Kim just sighed and went into the school's gymnasium. As I followed behind her, I tried to shake off the negative thoughts bouncing around in my head. It didn't help that my thirty-eighth birthday was today...the second day of school! I would rather be anywhere but here today! After our brief planning time, the two PE aides, the other teacher, and I made our way to the playground. Our grass and red dirt field leaves a lot to be desired. I never wear my really good clothes because I will probably be a lovely shade of orange by the end of the day.

Behind me, I hauled our trusty equipment cart filled with balls, bases, and jump ropes. Among the equipment rested our gigantic first aid kit complete with wet wipes, tissues, non-latex gloves, Band-Aids, and of course an enormous box of Ziploc bags. It amazes me how a bag of ice has miraculous healing powers, especially for those children who hurt their egos more than their bodies. Despite my attitude, I really am glad to be back at school. I enjoy observing how much the students have grown and hearing all of their summer vacation stories. But my favorites are new haircuts and recently lost teeth.

We survived the first three class periods with little incident. There were no major injuries, arguments, or disruptions. Classes were coming and going on schedule with very little congestion in the hallways. But it was getting hotter by the minute. Although

our exercise regimen for the day was extremely light due to the heat, everyone was still soaked from sweat.

I was so relieved that it was time for lunch. The four of us made our way into the gym that housed our small office. As all four of us sat around our small, wobbly table to eat, it was all we could do to keep perspiration drops from dripping onto our leftovers and sandwiches. With no air conditioning in the indoor playing facilities, lunch time was rather uncomfortable, but at least it was quiet. Robin and Frank went to check their emails, leaving Kim and me alone at the table.

"You're still thinking about our conversation this morning, aren't you?" Kim asked. I shook my head no, and she was quick to reply with, "You are so full of it. I have known you too long to believe that."

"Yeah, well, it probably wouldn't be on my mind so much if my sister-in-law hadn't just had a baby. Not to mention four of the faculty are pregnant now. And Amber is having twins! Shoot me now! Don't worry about me, though, I'll live."

I tossed the remainder of my sandwich into the garbage and said, "Come on; let's get ready. We've got kindergarten next." Great, that's just what I need right now, around one hundred and sixty five-year-olds crying to go home. Well, maybe I won't have to chase anyone trying to escape today. After prying several children from their teachers, we were able to line up all the students by class. It's not as difficult the first week of school. The teachers label their students complete with colorful stickers with name, teacher, and mode of transportation.

All the classes were outside and ready except one. Mrs. Haynes' class hadn't made it down the hill yet. Then I noticed her leading them slowly down the sidewalk,

trying to keep them in some semblance of a line. I heard Mrs. Haynes call my name, requesting my presence on the hill. I was selfishly asking God to please not let it be another runner or someone having an afternoon meltdown.

When I reached the hill, the children were gathered into a huddle. I was somewhat stunned because they were all smiling and giggling. As I observed this scene, I couldn't help but ache inside. It was so difficult to look into those faces, wishing that one of them would be smiling and waiting for me to pick them up after school with maybe a picture that they had drawn or a big stain of some kind on their shirt. I shook my head clear and patted Mrs. Haynes on the back. She was so sweet and full of kindness.

"What's up, Mrs. Haynes' friends!" I hooted. Without a word, the teacher counted to three using her fingers. What happened next completely floored me. Very softly, the smiling group of five-year-olds began to sing "Happy Birthday" to me. I could hardly breathe. I couldn't hear anything else going on around me, just their beautiful, innocent voices singing just for me. The tears flowed almost as fast as the beads of sweat that rolled down my cheeks.

After the way my morning had begun, I had had little hope of the day brightening very much. Boy, did this ever take me by surprise. God showed up and blessed me in such a special way, just when I needed it. I remember being on one knee, but I couldn't remember if I had knelt down or if I had fallen. I mustered up enough air to speak when the soft, tender voices finished. I extended my arms wide and said, "Thank you so much! Wow! What a treat! Okay, it's time for a group hug!"



All the kids squeezed close together as I wrapped my arms around them as far as I could. As the giant hug ended, my tears had finally stopped flowing. Then God's sense of humor showed up at just the right time. One of the boys in the back of the group passed gas so loudly that the children erupted into a running mass of laughter and giggles. After a little red-faced, red-haired boy squeaked out a quiet "excuse me," he took off running after his classmates down the hill where the class had already started with warm-up stretches. Mrs. Haynes stepped forward, hugged me and said, "You know I had to do it." As I watched my mentor walk away, I felt so thankful for her thoughtfulness. She usually knew when I needed a little something. I made a mental note to put a thank you card in her box in the morning.

The remainder of the day passed quickly with only a few minor scrapes, one second-grader vomiting, and my brand new kickball getting stuck in our one-and-only shade tree on the playground. As we gathered up our equipment after fifth grade went back to class, I couldn't help but wonder who the moron was that cut down all the huge trees to build this playground and then replanted trees that would take thirty years to grow tall enough to give any decent shade. Car rider duty almost did me in that afternoon. With idling cars in three lines on hot asphalt in ninety-eight degree weather, I was surprised we were all still standing upright. But I wasn't going to complain. The day was almost over, and I had a cold bottle of water waiting for me in my office refrigerator.

I walked past the buses as they were being loaded on my way back to the gym. I stopped momentarily to watch the chaos of teachers loading their students onto the correct bus. As I walked by, I heard a knocking overhead. I held my hand over my eyes



to see against the sun. There in one of the bus windows was one of Mrs. Haynes' students with her nose pressed against the glass. As she waved, she mouthed the words "Happy Birthday." I smiled and waved back to her. Her long ponytail was frazzled from a long fun day of learning new and interesting things. Her purple ribbon was missing now. I would keep it for her if I found it on the playground. I laughed to myself and wondered what her mom was going to say about the huge mustard stain on what looked like a brand new shirt. As disheveled as she was, she was absolutely beautiful to me.

She sat down into her seat, and we just watched each other as the bus pulled away. At that moment God spoke to my heart as clearly as if He were standing behind me. I AM HERE. IN MY TIME. Although I was dripping in sweat, a different kind of warmth blanketed me. It was a comfort only my Father could provide. And He did. He always did. He always does. When I arrived home, my husband was sitting on the porch waiting for me, while sipping a soda. He gave me a kiss on the cheek and asked me how my day went. As we sat together on the porch, I smiled at him and said, "I have to admit, it was one of the best days ever."

### Writing in the Physical Education Classroom

Physical education class is the last place you would expect to see required writing assignments. I am a firm believer in the idea that writing can be a valuable asset to teachers in any subject area. Not only is it important to have an active lifestyle, but it is equally important to enhance the understanding of healthy concepts through writing activities. In an article in the *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, & Dance*, Edward H. Behrman stated, "Overall, the main benefits of writing in physical education class may be summarized as writing to learn, writing to motivate, writing to assess, and writing to do. The very act of writing makes learning explicit, thereby shaping and structuring the learning" (22).

Writing helps motivate students to learn the importance of physical activities outside the physical education classroom, which is the goal of PE in the first place: lifelong fitness. Various writing genres incorporated before or after PE activities can inspire students to reflect on what they have learned and possibly change their attitudes about physical activity.

Through keeping diaries and writing in reflective journals, students may record exercise regimens, personal fitness goals, or feelings they may have about activities. Students in upper elementary and middle school grades can write summaries to give the teacher feedback on what they have learned. Through writing, students can explain how to perform skills, describe a defensive or offensive game strategy, or list the procedure steps of an activity (Behrman 23). Middle and high school students could complete assignments such as explaining point of view through argumentation (Behrman 24). Students of any age can use writing to make predictions or take scenarios, problem solve,

and create possible outcomes or solutions. Creating posters, manuals, and advertisements are also effective ways to incorporate writing into the physical education and health curriculum.

Creative writings such as poetry, narratives, songs, rhymes, and essays that are the “usual suspects” in the English classes can be integrated as well. Writing assignments give students opportunities to research health and sports related information, legendary athletes, and events such as the Olympics or Tour de France. Technology can be integrated by doing research, discussing information through chat rooms and blogs, or creating and designing web pages. Students in lower elementary classes can demonstrate what they have learned with technology, pictures, drawings, drama, and story telling.

There are no limits to what students can do to enhance their learning, apply their understanding, and demonstrate their creativity in physical education class. The possibilities are endless for the creative, willing physical education teacher to engage and motivate students in any grade level.

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**THERESA THOMAS**

God created my destiny for me.

## I AM FROM.....

I am from true love.  
A teenage affair blossomed into marriage,  
Glued by the birth of a first child.

I am from sunshine.  
The warm and freshly polished concrete of the veranda  
Glistening in the Jamaican sun,  
Its sole purpose, to reflect the innocence of a young island girl.

I am from the earth.  
From fruit trees in my grandparents' garden  
The swaying green leaves of enormous trees,  
Standing in perfect formation as an army going into battle  
The entrance welcoming me like the pearly gates of heaven.

I am from freedom.  
Roaming from fruit tree to fruit tree like a humming bird  
floating from flower to flower sipping on sweet succulent nectar

I am from strong beliefs.  
Pretty pink and white dresses  
Adorned with flowers,  
Skipping up the street to church

I am from these memories.  
Rooted in their very culture,  
Yet now transplanted in another land.

## The Veranda

He was angry and I knew he was.

"What is your problem?" I asked, as he lunged at me like a lion on a prey with eyes red with contempt.

"You, he screamed, you never listen to anyone! I am older than you, and you must listen to me", he continued.

It was not our veranda, even though we lived in the house.

The house and veranda were owned by them.

The veranda was always welcoming yet filled with tension.

The orange rays of the sun warmed the veranda, as a slice of grandma's homemade apple pie fresh from the oven would warm your soul, yet there was a chilling feeling when they were around.

The veranda was filled with countless memories.

It was like a world within itself.

It was my freedom, but still, it symbolized my captivity.

It was a place where I would go on a warm Saturday afternoon and sit while the smell of sweet potato pudding arose from the brick kitchen, stained black as soot below the house, permeating the air like oxygen.

It was a place of thinking.

The kind of thoughts that made you imagine you were a butterfly floating in the air.

It was a place of reminiscing.

The kind of reminiscing that made your heart leap and a ball form in your throat in anticipation of a gift that Santa might bring to you that was at the top of your list.

It was a place of disdain.

The kind of disdain that you are still afraid to talk about,

The kind that you are so afraid to think about in fear that God might see what you are thinking.

It was a place of regret.

The kind of regret that makes you wish you could go back in time and rewrite your life.

The veranda is filled with all the memories you would like to remember, but still would rather forget.

## Cyber bullying

“I believe television is going to be the test of the modern world, and that in this new opportunity to see beyond the range of our vision we shall discover either a new and unbearable disturbance of the general peace, or a soaring radiance in the sky”(qtd.in Murray 7). During his time, the new technology that had emerged was the television, and to some people, it was of the devil. It was viewed as a medium that would eventually capture and rule the minds of the children and bring to an end the human race as we know it. Ironically, this is a popular theme on many movies that can be viewed of the SCIFI channel today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Technology has now become an integral part in today's society and, subsequently, the classroom. It has now become the means by which society functions. In the grocery stores, we can now check out items without the assistance of a store clerk. Doctors are able to provide treatments and make diagnoses that they would otherwise not be able to do if it were not for technology. Crimes can now be solved and/ or prevented because of the use of technology. An individual in a terrible car accident is able to get help through a device in the car that notifies the appropriate authorities of the car wreck, and as a result, a life is saved. We are able to get driving directions and information at the click of a button only because of technology. Technology has become such a normal part of our daily lives today that many of us do not realize that we are using technology. The classroom is not immune to this phenomenon.

To grasp and keep the students' attention an educator needs to be versed on various forms of technology. Students out of the classroom are constantly on their cell

phones. They all have ipods, mp3 players, laptops, Nintendo Wii, Gameboys and many other gadgets that we may not know about. They are either texting or surfing the Internet. They constantly check their MySpace or Facebook accounts. They are either posting or responding to a blog, uploading or downloading videos, or podcasting. They are truly children of the media. They are the 21<sup>st</sup> century learners.

These gadgets, though beneficial, can also prove to be detrimental. The students of this generation are wired up. As a result, there are certain ramifications that arise. One such ramification is cyber bullying. According to Candice M. Kelsey, in the book *Generation MySpace*, "Cyber-bullying can be defined as harassment or intimidation by way of hurtful images and or messages spread or posted via e-mail, blogs, instant messaging, Internet chat rooms, online social-networking pages, digital cameras, and cell phones" (111). Unfortunately in today's society, this has become common place. Too many times we turn on the television, or open a webpage and read about a teenager that has committed suicide because of a picture that was circulated online or sent via text messaging. Most recently, we all read about the fourteen-year-old girl that committed suicide in her home because of a fake MySpace profile that her friend's mother created to bully her. The students spend a lot of their time socializing on the Internet.

According to Kelsey, "In February 2006, teens spent the most time on Myspace, averaging 368 minutes per visitor, up 22 percent from the year before" (5). That was the statistics from three years ago when approximately 86 percent of high school teenagers had access to the Internet. Today in 2009, there are without a doubt a higher percentage of teenagers that have access to the Internet and even a greater number with MySpace pages and other social network pages. This gives rise to students using these medias as

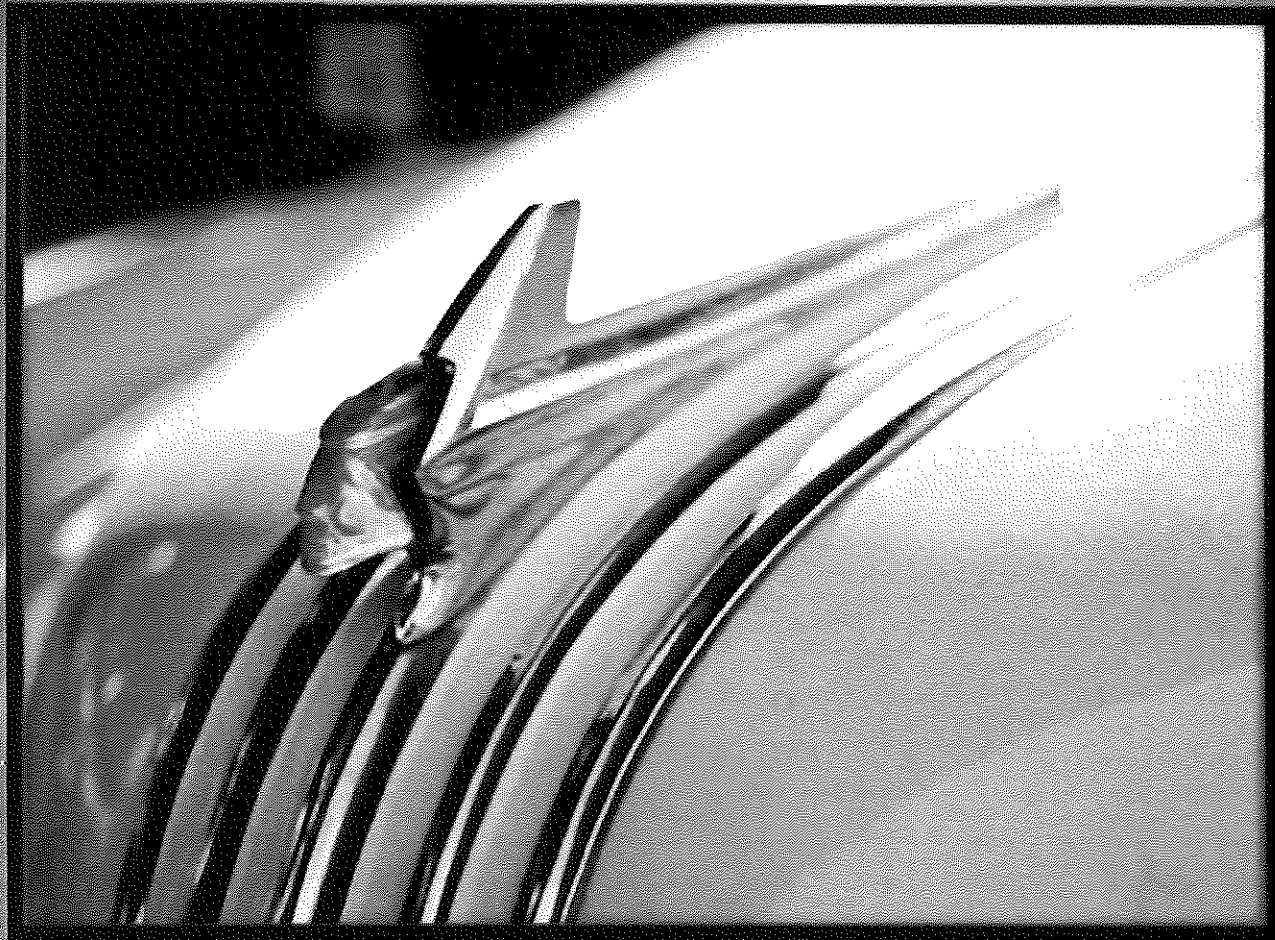


venting grounds. A child feels more comfortable using his/her 'personal' page to unleash the frustration of the day as opposed to confronting the source of the problem. At times, this leads to cyber bullying. The information on the Internet is easily disseminated as opposed to word of mouth. Students who do not have the courage to be physical bullies can now disguise themselves in the form of cyber bullies and direct their anger toward someone (a classmate, someone that they see as different, an outcast, and an educator). The act of cyber bullying can allow the aggressor to feel somewhat invincible and, as a result, continue that behavior. Cyber bullies are sometimes victims that have become aggressors themselves so that they can direct attention from themselves.

Many students are not aware that they take part in cyber bullying when they choose to stand by and watch it happen. As educators and parents, we have a responsibility to keep abreast of all the new technology that is available to our children. They are in an age of technology, but we as educators and parents bring this technology into the home--the places where our children seek refuge. As a result we need to, by all means, ensure that they are not abusing or being abused by this availability of technology. Kelsey, in her book, describes symptoms that a child might exhibit if he or she is being bullied. She has also suggested some websites that can be used to stop bullying. These websites are [www.Hotxt.co.uk](http://www.Hotxt.co.uk), [www.vodafone.com/au](http://www.vodafone.com/au), [www.kidsok.net/company.php](http://www.kidsok.net/company.php). Even though we cannot protect our students and children from everything, taking the necessary precautions can only be a step closer to the cure.

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New York, Marlowe and Company, 2007.



# **ALLYSON TYLER**

Teaching tender hearts  
and  
open minds.

### Where I'm From

I'm from fresh linens,  
from white vinegar and aloe vera.  
I am from a dead-end street  
(where we could roam from end to end  
without any worries).  
I am from the sweet smell of pine  
and cedar hope chests  
whose aromatic smell  
still conjures up vast memories even now.

I'm from tight braids and big bows,  
from my God-fearing Momma and my heavenly Daddy.  
I'm from "act like a lady" and "clean your plate,"  
from "sit up straight" to the LOOK.  
I'm from "Pass it On"  
to "Jesus, I adore thee."

I'm from good back-row Baptists,  
Sunday dinners and black coffee  
to the long-forgotten field of fresh vegetables.  
From the odd place on granddaddy's nose to  
Paw Paw pouring concrete up until his 80's.  
In a spare room are  
many clippings and photos from long ago,  
holding onto those memories brings both joy and grief.

I am from those pocketed moments  
stored in numerous boxes  
and placed indelibly in our hearts.

### Where I'm Going

I am going to places unexplored,  
from deep within my consciousness.  
I am going to make lasting impressions  
on the students entrusted to me.  
I am going to do thankless work and spend long nights grading  
papers to be disregarded shortly thereafter.

I am going where many teachers have trod before,  
tenured in a school I enjoy and thankful to be there.  
It has been a long, hard journey,  
three schools under my belt and  
many tears, long-night pep talks,  
and questioning my choice of profession.

Teaching has seen me through  
the pure excitement of a new job  
to the deep seemingly bottomless hole of divorce  
and back to regained happiness once more.  
We have weathered many troubled readers together  
to drawn-out data meetings and low DIBELS scores.

I am going back to a new year  
with an array of possibilities and opportunities,  
And many new faces looking to me  
to be momma, nurse, and even trusted confidant.

I am going back to the place I love,  
the classroom to don my many hats and  
share my eye-opening writing project experience  
with my little sponges waiting to be soaked with knowledge.

### Questions from Childless Arms

Why is the house so quiet?

Oh yeah, I have no  
little feet and voices to fill the space.

How does the childless room stay so clean?

The only visitors it sees are the curious children of my friends and my precious  
stepdaughter who visits so seldom.

Why does every female conversation go back to children and childbirth?

It is an important journey and experience  
they all share, except me.

Why is it that my body is not working properly?

Medically speaking, I have no diagnosis.

What do I see?

I look around to see those blessed with children  
considering it a curse or an inconvenience.

Why not me?

Have I not been "good enough,"  
or am I "paying for my past"?

Why do I look for objects and activities to fill that place?

Maybe a new outfit or  
a long-awaited trip will do.

Why the long wait from month to month?

Will I be, Will I not?  
Try again, take a break, or give up -- if only for a while.

Why do I revisit this topic SO often?

It is what I think about  
when I see children playing  
or a daily reminder of my busy classroom.

When will the obsession end and life without becomes my new normal?

How old will I be or how long will I have to wait  
before I accept it as a truth?

What is the next step then?

I give up! Adoption, surrogacy, or foster care.

When does the peace come?

Maybe in the morning, there will be  
acceptance, resolution, or the hope to move on.

Only God knows, and until then,  
I just wonder and pray.

### **My Boyfriend**

On a man hiatus and  
Enjoying my girl time,  
Then he comes along  
Very persistent, very kind  
With eyes as deep as the ocean.

"I love you" after two weeks  
In a drunken stupor,  
Oh, it's way too soon!

He hung around and smoothed my feathers  
When they became ruffled.  
He told me to "Lu-Lu,"  
When I thought my world was a mess.

He is my confidant --  
Even though he can't keep a secret.  
He is my Love, my Hero,  
And the humor in my days.  
He makes me laugh,  
When all I want to do is cry!

He can do anything --  
In my mind.  
He can fix it -- I think!

I wouldn't trade him for the world  
Because he is my rock,  
my Lover,  
my Friend,  
And my Forever.

(aka my Husband )



### Case study of Sarah

Sarah came into my room like a whirlwind. I had heard all kinds of stories about “Sarah” starting with the day her name appeared on my class roster. Other teachers were huddled in groups asking to peruse each other’s list. However, the sound “Oh, you have Sarah!” was heard loud and clear when they realized that she was all mine for the next nine months. I have always been of the opinion that I really don’t want to know others’ input on my students. I feel that what is in the past, as pertains to learning, should stay there. Every student deserves a clean slate. I prefer to make my own first, last, and final diagnosis of that child’s abilities, personality, and potential. I also truly believe that some teachers and students don’t always mesh. I’d heard horror stories about how Sarah was the reason that the teacher from whom I inherited this room changed schools.

On the first day of school, I observed, as the children were putting away their school supplies, that Sarah was all over the place visiting with classmates, parents, and siblings. I think I had shown her seat to her no less than five times while her mother was there. Finally her mother left, and a new normal started to play out in our classroom as rules and procedures were introduced.

Next, I started my evaluation of each student. I used several methods to determine our small groups. I performed my assessment using the following methods: flash cards with words and sounds from first grade, STAR (Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading) test results, a list of basic sight words, DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) results, and, of course, teacher observation. During my testing, I noticed that Sarah was having difficulty recognizing common

sight words and reading a complete sentence fluently without interruptions. I also determined that a big part of Sarah's problem was her inability to maintain attention. If there were the slightest noise or movement, she was extremely distracted. Through all of this evaluation and using her test results, the reading coach and I determined that she would need to receive special services daily. This meant that Sarah and a few others would leave the classroom each day for about 30-40 minutes to receive one-on-one instruction. Sarah would also be in my small reading group with other students who struggled in some of the same areas she did.

Sarah wrestled with learning throughout the year. I didn't feel that we made as much progress as I had expected. Sarah did climb in the number of words she read and soon learned to recognize most of the sight words and phrases. I was very pleased with this. However, Sarah's biggest challenge remained sitting still and maintaining attention. I must say that I am not a big fan of medication, but in this case, I felt that it would benefit Sarah and keep her on track. I spoke with her mother several times throughout the year to suggest this, and I was met with great opposition. I also spoke with the resource teacher, who shared my opinion that Sarah's attention span was greatly affecting her learning. However, after the first semester, her mother did try to trick her by giving her daily vitamins and leading her to believe they were her medicine to help her in school. This worked only for a very brief time.

As the school year was drawing to an end, Sarah was still in danger of failing, her behavior was horrible, and her mother still resisted giving Sarah medication. I continued to give her my heart and to work with her one on one when time permitted.

That school year came to a close, and I had to come to the realization that I couldn't win them all, even the Sarahs of the world. I felt so defeated.

As the next school year started, it was my turn to pass Sarah on to another teacher and inform her that she would have "Sarah." I did not enjoy this, but I did my best to keep it upbeat and let her form her own opinion. Sarah's new teacher and I had several conferences about her progress and the idea of medication. I am very pleased to report that her mother did give in to the idea of medication for her attention problems. The next few weeks were filled with only good reports and happy faces from both Sarah and her third grade teacher.

Then Sarah came to my room one day to read aloud to me. The piece that she brought with her was a non-fiction piece about spiders. My instructions were simply to listen to her read. Sarah started out, making sure that I was giving her 100% of my attention, and the rest I found simply amazing. Sarah was reading with emotion and fluency! This child that had struggled so with simple words and phrases was reading fluently before my eyes. I was trying to hide my shock as she read. It was such sweet harmony to my ears. Additionally, her demeanor was much calmer. I must say that this experience with medication and learning has made me realize that some children need that little boost, either by medication or teacher, to help them reach their personal and academic goals. I also feel proud that I was part of the foundation that helped her reach her final goal of being a life-long learner and loving it!

Feinberg, Stephen, William Fernekes, and Samuel Totten. "The Significance of Rationale Statements." *Teaching and Studying the Holocaust*. Ed. Stephen Feinberg and Samuel Totten. Heedham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 2001. Print.

In this, the first chapter of the book, the editors provide a fully developed reason for teachers to consider the entire range of topics, ideas, views, and approaches to teaching the Holocaust before ever entering a classroom. The editors along with William Fernekes, admit, "A good place to begin with the development of rationale statements for a study of the Holocaust is with the students themselves" (11). The authors list a series of students' questions about the Holocaust (16). Also in this chapter are questions teachers should ask themselves before preparing a lesson plan. The authors respond to these questions with a separate list that provides many reasons and explanations, but they urge teachers to discover personal and significant reasons which will best suit the age, maturity, and intelligence of their students. One example of a rationale statement provided by the authors is "to demonstrate how a modern nation can utilize its technological expertise and bureaucratic infrastructure to implement destructive policies ranging from social engineering to genocide" (5). Feinberg, Totten, and Fernekes encourage teachers to teach the myriad reasons the Holocaust happened and the resounding effects it still produces.

— Susan Ashley

Hewitt, Geoff. "Anatomy of a Poetry Workshop." *Today You Are My Favorite Poet*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998. 1-8. Print.

This book is about writing poetry with teenagers, and the first chapter describes the author's experience with a two week student poetry workshop. He talks about students' desire to create poetry that is "vague" and difficult to understand. As they begin to create "throw away pieces" in class, the students become more and more engaged in the process of creating poems and start to see "the line as the building block of poetry." Students then take the assignment one step further; after a discussion of plagiarism, students agree to let each other "steal" their favorite lines of poetry from each other's work and create new poems from these great lines. Hewitt provides fun examples and excellent exercises to encourage student writing.

— Ann Blackwood

Berman, Sally. *Thinking Strategies for Science*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2008. Print.

Berman presents a well-orchestrated book for sharing strategies in science for fifth through twelfth grades. In this second edition, she highlights the differences between the editions. The first part of the book begins with activities for gathering information. This particular concept seemingly coincides with the beginning of the school year when the scientific method is taught, therefore, serving as a helpful tool to introduce observations along with other steps. Other sections included in this book are

processing information, analyzing and applying information, and designing one's own activities. Several graphic organizers are exhibited that could be used throughout the year and tailored to specific subjects and grades. Berman offers numerous helpful hints to enhance thinking skills, especially in the field of science.

— Vanessa Bonner

Neu, Terry W. and Rich Weinfeld. "Bullying." *Helping Boys Succeed in School*. Waco: Prufrock Press, Inc., 2007. Print.

This is a good book that discusses bullying in-depth. It describes various kinds of bullying, lists different warning signs that indicate victims of bullying, describes the characteristics of bullies and victims, and offers ways to intervene and try to prevent bullying or victimization. It is an easy to read book and gives teachers vital information on a very dangerous behavior that is plaguing our schools.

— Debbie Fancher

Devoto, Pat Cunningham. *My Last Days as Roy Rogers*. New York: Warner Books, 1999. Print.

*My Last Days as Roy Rogers* is a beautiful southern coming-of-age story about a little girl named Tabitha Rutland. It takes place in Alabama during the 1950s when the polio epidemic is rampant. Tabitha is out of school for the summer and makes friends with Maudie, "the lightest brown colored person" she has ever seen. The two embark on a summer full of adventure in a story that should appeal to middle school students in this area. The book uses many allusions that students can relate to north Alabama, such as downtown strips, the TVA Dam, and jug fishing, just to mention a few.

— Julie Higdon

Dixon, Deborah. *Writing Your Heritage: A Sequence of Thinking, Reading, and Writing Assignments*. Berkeley: National Writing Project, 1993. Print.

In this book, Writing Project participant Deborah Dixon describes her freshman composition course that is designed around the ideas of individual, familial, and cultural identity. In her course, students begin with personal memoirs, conduct genealogical research through references and oral history, write researched (and documented) essays, and conclude with an argumentative essay whose topic has been generated through earlier course requirements. Students who are visual learners might especially be stimulated by creating an individual coat of arms and responding to writing assignments that are developed around the visual representation of important personal symbols. Dixon includes suggestions for using the ideas generated through writing and research to teach other subjects across the curriculum.

— Joy Maloney

Stotsky, Sandra. "Ethical Guidelines for Writing Assignments." *Social Issues in the English Classroom*. C. Mark Hurlbert and Samuel Totten, eds. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1992. Print.

In this article, Stotsky discusses the need for teachers to use ethical considerations when discussing social issues in the classroom and when giving students writing assignments based on those issues. These ethical considerations include the need for discussions and assignments to be relevant to the course being taught. Additionally, she offers the following guidelines: that assignments should be grade-appropriate; that topics for discussion and writing should not be likely to elicit hostile responses; that independent thinking should be encouraged; that students should draw from a variety of sources, including sources of their own choosing; and that students' writing should go through the complete writing process (drafting, revision, editing, etc.) so that the finished pieces reflect well on students and teachers and do justice to the chosen issue. Stotsky further asserts that teachers should avoid using works of literature for the sole purpose of considering a social issue. In other words, a work should be considered on its own merits (aesthetic and otherwise) to avoid presenting it as an authoritative text or propaganda piece.

— David Myer

Burke, Jim. The English Teacher's Companion. Second Edition. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003. Print.

Jim Burke addresses reading and writing in schools. He not only shows the significance of knowing how to write, but he illustrates how reading leads to better writing and that knowing how to write leads to better understanding when reading. Burke addresses the concerns that many teachers have in relation to grammar in today's society. He voices the concerns of employers and college professors pertaining to students' "lack of grammatical correctness" and suggests many different strategies that an educator can implement in the classroom to address these concerns. Burke shows how to incorporate grammar into daily lessons, including literature, so that it is not considered the enemy. He addresses concerns not only of English teachers but also of educators in general. He addresses teaching reading, speaking, and listening. He also discusses how to plan a unit of study, use technology in the classroom, measure student's progress, address culture in the classroom, and how to become a better teacher. These are just a few of the topics that are discussed in this book.

— Theresa Thomas

Smith, Mary Ann and Miriam Ylvisaker. *Teachers' Voices: Portfolios in the Classroom*. Berkeley, CA: National Writing Project Corporation, 1993. 49-59. Print.

In the chapter "Portfolios as Discovery," a Mississippi teacher reflects on three portfolios of students in her 2<sup>nd</sup> grade classroom. She first discusses her discomfort with writing and feeling like an adequate writer growing up. She also felt there was no connection between things she was successful with outside of school as compared with

the pen-to-paper things required of her in school. She takes us through the process of maintaining a portfolio on each student. The students are able to choose the pieces that go into their portfolio and, if they wish, can have added support from the teacher, parents, and peers. In conclusion, she discovers that because the children have had some input into the final work, they feel successful. She also points out that not all entries are grammatically correct at first. Each work goes through the writing process from brainstorming, to rough draft, to final copy. She also asks the children questions pertaining to how these writings made them feel, which one was their favorite, and how they have developed as writers in the process. I found this chapter exciting because the children developed their writing, felt that it was their own work, and had the power to choose the final works that were included in the portfolio.

— Allyson Tyler